
THE

DAILY ATHLETE

JOURNAL

Created by Derek Thiessen

DEDICATION

*To the relentless athletes grinding their way to
glory and striving towards self-discovery.*

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We are what we repeatedly do.
EXCELLENCE, THEN, IS NOT
AN ACT, BUT A HABIT.

-

ARISTOTLE

Hey there,

First off, I just wanted to say thank you.

Now for those of you who don't know me, my name is Derek Thiessen. I'm a former volleyball player, the founder of *Daily Athlete*, and the creator of this journal. I started this journey as a form of self-reflection. I wanted to figure out why I didn't reach the pinnacle of my sport. Meanwhile, some of my former teammates went on to become Olympians. I always had my assumptions, but it wasn't until I wrote it down and turned it into something for other people to learn from that I figured out where I went wrong.

If you'd like to read the article, head over to dailyathlete.life/olympian

Looking back, one area I struggled with most was that I did not consistently take action on the little things to make the most of each day. I would get complacent with the status quo or would back down from the small challenges because I couldn't see their real value.

This is why I created *The Daily Athlete Journal*. I recognized that for others to avoid my mistakes, they needed an accountability tool that is simple, yet effective. By taking the time to appreciate each day, plan how you are going to make the most of it, and then review how it all went; you will reduce your odds of letting meaningful days pass you by.

In using this journal, I hope you will begin to recognize three things:

1. You have an amazing life that you should be truly grateful for.
2. Your day-to-day actions improve long-term growth.
3. Your life is circumstantial, but how you respond to it is a choice.

One more thing - This journal is neither a magic pill nor a treasure map for success – it is only the compass. How you choose to use it is entirely up to you. In the end, it's on you to put in the hard work.

Good luck and enjoy the grind,

Derek Thiessen

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5 TIPS FOR MAXIMISING THIS JOURNAL

Here you are, getting started and full of motivation. But as studies have shown, motivation and willpower are limited resources.¹ If you want a habit to stick, you need to anticipate how your future self might try to cut corners. Keep in mind these five tips to get the most of this journal:

KEEP IT CLOSE. When you eat breakfast, this journal should be there. When you get ready for bed, this journal should sit on your nightstand. When you finish practice, this journal should be in your locker. Your motivation will come and go, but if you keep this journal close, your goals will always stay with you.

BE CREATIVE. One of the challenges of answering the same questions each day is that it has the possibility of feeling monotonous. That's why it's important to get creative. Just like your coach finds new ways to practice the same skill, you need to find different ways to think about these questions to avoid going through the motions.

BE CONSISTENT. Part of what makes the "Greats" great is that they never take days off. Even when they are away from training, they ask themselves: "How are my actions today moving me toward my goals?" To be great, you must be willing to make sacrifices; one of which is never taking a day off.

TELL SOMEONE ELSE. By sharing both your goals and this new journaling habit with other people, you are ensuring they will start to become part of your reality. By talking about what you want to accomplish, you increase your accountability and your motivation to follow through with this new habit.

REVIEW YOUR GOALS. Creating your goals is the first step. But just writing them down isn't enough. You have to revisit them. Your daily actions will push you towards your goals, but if you can't remember what you are aiming for, these actions don't matter that much.

MORNING ROUTINE



*If one does not
know to which port
one is sailing,
NO WIND IS
FAVORABLE.*

-

SENECA

THE DAILY DOSE (of gratitude)

What are the three things you are grateful for today?

WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

There are two great definitions of gratitude, one from Harvard Medical School:

“A thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives ... As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals – whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.”

And another from Angeles Arrien, author of *Living in Gratitude*:

“Gratitude is a feeling that spontaneously emerges from within. However, it is not simply an emotional response; it is also a choice we make. We can choose to be grateful, or we can choose to be ungrateful—to take our gifts and blessings for granted. As a choice, gratitude is an attitude or disposition.”

Together these definitions help us understand that gratitude is not only a sensation we can all experience, but it's one that we must actively choose to live out.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ATHLETES

In sports, you are surrounded by failure. Every day you sign up to experience it, and you've chosen to let it become part of the learning curve.

But what happens to you when day after day failure is beating you down? It's taunting you, mocking you, and belittling your confidence. How will you ensure that failure doesn't manifest itself into self-defeat and giving up hope?

That's right! Through practicing gratitude.

As athletes, we rarely express gratitude. It's not until an award acceptance speech or retirement that we thank everyone who has helped us achieve our goals. Every day we know that there are countless variables and people that have led to our success.

Not only does gratitude make you a better person, but it can help you become a better athlete too. Gratitude leads to greater feelings of trust and connectedness (teamwork). It improves sleep quality (recovery). On top of that, it diminishes emotions like envy, frustration, and regret (happiness). And lastly, it forces you to practice finding the positive in any situation (resilience).

WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

In the end, the key takeaway from the practice of gratitude is how it allows you to reframe any situation. You can either choose to see the negative in everything or you can choose to see only the positive and make a decision to be grateful for what you have. Use this question as a chance to get your daily dose of gratitude. Here's what it looks like in action:

THE DAILY DOSE | Who or what am I grateful for?

Not having any injuries this month.

Having a coach whom I respect and respects me in return.

That my parents pushed me to play multiple sports.

A USEFUL LITTLE TIP:

When answering this question, do your best not to repeat an answer for at least a week. You'll be surprised by how many things you have to be grateful for. If you are struggling to feel grateful for it, take a second to imagine what your life would be like without it.

We can
COMPLAIN
because rose bushes
have thorns, or
REJOICE
because thorns
have roses.

-

ALPHONSE KARR

THE DAILY GROWTH

What can I improve or do differently today?

In the somewhat inconsistently brilliant movie franchise, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Captain Jack Sparrow, is well-known for having a unique compass that doesn't point north. Instead, for whoever holds it, the compass points to *the thing you want most in this world*.

Remarkably, our brains have their own Jack Sparrow compass. It's called the *Reticular Activating System* (RAS). This is the handy-dandy bundle of nerves at your brainstem that filters out unnecessary information, so the important stuff gets through. It's the reason when you learn a new word you begin to see it everywhere. Or why you can randomly hear your name in a large crowd despite the noise all around you.ⁱⁱ

Your RAS essentially filters the world around you and provides you with what matters most. By asking yourself every morning “*what can I improve or do differently?*” you are providing an immediate directive. In essence, you are “setting your intent” for the day. And when you do so, your brain will start to seek out information that will aid your intentions. You begin to see opportunities for growth where you might not have seen them before. Pretty awesome, right?

Here are a couple of examples of how you might answer this question:

THE DAILY GROWTH | What can I improve or do differently today?

Responding positively when my coach gives feedback.

Spend the last hour of the day not looking at a screen.

***“Action may not
always bring happiness,
but there is no happiness
without action.”***

- BENJAMIN DISRAELI

THE DAILY 3

What if I could only accomplish three things today?

To achieve a long-term goal, the daily action is required. In the words of Ray Lewis, "Greatness is a lot of small things done well. Day after day, workout after workout, obedience after obedience, day after day."

WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

In the diagram below you will see **DAILY ACTIONS** at the bottom. These are things like going to bed early, creating a meal plan or stretching after practice. They are small, but collectively they make a difference. And if you achieve enough of them you will reach the next level:

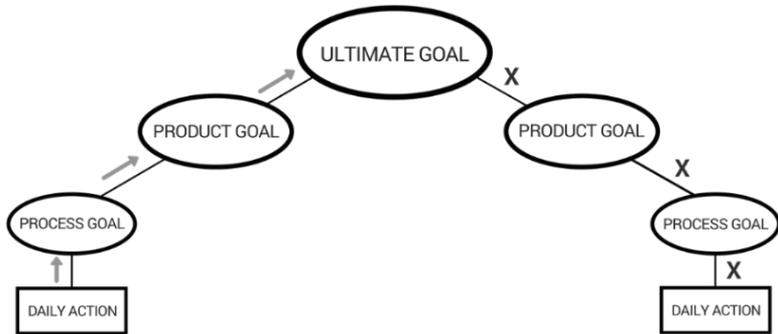
PROCESS GOALS: These define *what it takes* to reach...

PRODUCT GOALS: Measurable landmarks that move you towards your...

ULTIMATE GOALS: The achievements you want to be remembered for.

(More on these goals later)

As you can see, this entire chain of events starts from the bottom. And if you slack off and skip out on certain daily actions, it affects your ability to reach the next level of goals. And although you are achieving in one area of your life, the probability of reaching your ultimate goal becomes far less likely.



This is a simplified illustration, but the lesson remains. You can either choose a meaningless life where nothing matters, or you can act as if EVERYTHING you do makes a difference.

What you do matters today, so make the most of it.

WHY SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF?

Dan Ariely, a professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University, is well known for his research in human behavior. In one of his experiments, participants were asked to build Bionicles (like Lego), and he paid them \$2 for the first one they built, then slightly less for each following toy.

In one group, after assembling the Bionicle, researchers would set it aside. With another group, the researchers began dismantling the toys as soon as they received them. In the first group, the subjects made on average 11 Bionicles before giving up. The second group walked away after making just 7.ⁱⁱⁱ

This experiment reinforces a simple but important message:

People want to feel like their effort is worthwhile and to know that their work is moving them towards something bigger.

HOW WILL YOU HANDLE ADVERSITY?

Being an athlete isn't always easy and reaching an elite level of performance isn't something that is just handed out for free. It takes a serious level of gritty-nasty-focused-effort, and you have to bring that *every single day*. If you never take time to figure out why that effort is even worth it or where it's leading to, you are going to struggle when things get difficult.

When adversity comes knocking you need a reason to open the door. Setting up *daily actions* with the long-term in mind is one of the best ways we can do that. Here's how it might look in action:

THE DAILY 3 | Actions, tasks, or steps that will push me towards my goals:

1. Bringing healthy snacks for after practice.
2. Meditate before 10 am.
3. Get to practice early so I can get a proper warm-up

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Do not answer this question with actions that are already mandatory (i.e., practice or weights). Instead, describe your ideal mindset for practice or choose a new habit that is lacking in your current daily routine.

GOAL SETTING PIT-STOP

Understanding Your Aims

Let me ask you this: *Do you have a vision for your future?*

When you think about your aims in life and about the future you want, have you ever considered what it might look like? The people who will be there with you, the legacy you will leave behind, the achievements you will have earned – all of these are important elements to consider as they are what will guide you going forward.

It's easy to write down goals on a piece of paper. Anyone can do that. You can look at them every single day and come back to them as many times as you want. But here's the real question, *why do they even matter?*

One of the overlooked aspects of creating goals is taking time to develop a vision of what the future will look like. You have to create a compelling future for yourself. If you don't, you will give up on your goals because they won't appear to be worth it. Like those in the Bionicles study that had their toys destroyed, there was no overall purpose behind their efforts. In the same way, without a vision or a reason for your goals, they are just meaningless words.

THE POWER OF AN ANTI-VISION

Conversely, as important as it is to establish a vision for what we want, it can be just as powerful, if not more. So, it's prudent to create an anti-vision of where you *don't* want to be. An anti-vision is the accumulation of all your bad habits, your complacency, and you just "showing up." And by thinking about what that could be, you create a strong motivator. Just think about how much more driven you are to win a race against an opponent vs. just the time.

When you're tired, sore, weak, and seeing nothing but failure surrounding you, you will need a vision, an anti-vision, and goals that justify the suffering.

Now is your chance to create them!

3 TYPES OF GOALS: Process, Product, Ultimate

Once you've got a future vision sorted out, it's important to establish which category your goals fall into. As mentioned previously, there are three general categories where all goals fit; each has their different use and application:

PROCESS GOALS: These define *what it takes* to reach product goals.
"In this training session, I will stay low and move my feet quickly on defense."

PRODUCT GOALS: Measurable landmarks that move you towards your ultimate goals. *"In this training session, I will stay low and move my feet quickly on defense."*

ULTIMATE GOALS: The achievements you want to be remembered for.
"Set the record for most points scored." or "Known as a loving teammate."

GOAL SETTING WORKSHEETS

Where is all this going?

—

With all that in mind, take some time to create new goals. By first creating the vision for your future you will have a clearer understanding of the goals that are necessary to get there. Start with the vision and work your way forward.

1) What are your three greatest values or priorities in life right now?

Value #1 _____

Value #2 _____

Value #3 _____

*Keeping these three values in mind, create a vision for how you want your life to look in the future. You can go more short-term with 1-2 years or think big picture a decade from now. Describe what it will feel like, who will be there with you, the type of character you will have, and the specific accomplishments that you will have achieved. ***Need more space? Use the notes section at the back****

On the flip side, take a second to list out where you DON'T want to be in that same period of time. What will life look like if you don't improve? What regrets do you not want to have? How could your bad habits get worse?

2) What is your Ultimate Goal as an athlete?

3) What is the one Product Goal that you have for the next 6-12 months?

List three Process Goals required to achieve that goal:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) What is the second product goal that you have for the next 6-12 months?

List three Process goals required to achieve that goal:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

*Looking to better understand yourself, your future, and your goals?
Check out the *Future Planning* worksheets later in this journal.*

EVENING ROUTINE



**WITHOUT
REFLECTION,
WE GO BLINDLY**

*on our way, creating more
unintended consequences,
and failing to achieve
anything useful.*

-

MARGARET J. WHEATLEY

THE LAST CHOICE OF THE DAY

Will I get to forget or get better?

At the end of each day, you have a choice. You can shut yourself off from the world, forget everything that happened, zone out, and wait for the final moments to scroll by. Or you can be a mature individual who genuinely cares about getting better and take time to review your day.

The evening portion of this journal is intended to promote incremental improvement. By taking time to self-evaluate, define your challenges, remember your wins, and plan for tomorrow – you are essentially giving yourself a chance to correct your course on a daily basis. It’s often the case that we don’t realize we’re off course until weeks or months have passed by. But with the evening review, you get the chance to realign yourself every day.

Thank goodness!

DAILY SELF-EVALUATIONS

If I were to ask you, what was last Tuesday like? You might be able to tell me what you did, who you saw, and maybe what you ate for dinner. But would you be able to recall your emotional state, your eating habits, or your work ethics? *Probably not!*

Our selective memory can sometimes serve us well, as it allows us to put bad experiences in the past. However, it can also be deceitful. It often lacks detail or anything useful that can be objectively measured.

This is why it’s important to perform a daily evaluation exercise. While the emotions and specific actions are fresh in your mind, you should take time to measure yourself in specific categories accurately. This way you can objectively look back and measure yourself.

It’s also important to pay attention to the correlations. When using this journal, it can be tempting to go through the motions, fill in the blanks, and check it off the list. But you must remind yourself that this journal is an accountability tool that can record and evaluate your progress.

Example Below: *Your energy, nutrition, and effort are low, but the stress is high; this might be due to your lack of sleep or poor nutrition.*



NOTE: The scale is from 1-5 with 1 being **Very Poor** and 5 being **Great!**

DAILY EVALUATION DEFINITIONS

NUTRITION: Ensuring that your body is properly fueled to perform at your best and avoiding foods that hinder your performance and stop your body from being in a peak state.

Did you eat junk food today?

How balanced were your meals?

TEAMWORK: Looking for ways to be a “we” player instead of a “me” player and sharing your thoughts and ideas with teammates and coaches to progress towards the collective goal.

How well did you provide or listen to constructive feedback?

Did you consider how your actions hurt or helped the goals of the team?

EFFORT: Giving more than your bare minimum and making a choice to work hard, not just doing what comes naturally without really trying.

Could you have given more today?

How much pain did you push yourself through?

STRESS: Feeling overwhelmed by the strains and pulls of life. Not being able to mentally cope with the demands of day to day activities and the expectations set by both yourself and those around you.

Do you feel like you have no time to relax?

Are you irritable, touchy, or bad-tempered?

ENERGY: Having both the physical and mental ability to perform at your peak. Feeling well recovered and engaged for your every activity.

Did I feel at full strength today?

Did my energy levels dip?

JOY: To truly enjoy what you are currently doing or to see the pleasure and awesomeness in the process of what you are doing. Sports are supposed to be fun. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be worth pursuing this much.

Did you have fun practicing today?

Do you get a sense of fulfillment from what you are doing?

Is this making you happy?

LEARNING FROM CHALLENGES

How am I learning from my greatest adversities?

—

Whether it's in sports or everyday life, you are bound to face challenges and adversity. Not a single day goes by that you won't encounter some form of difficulty, struggle, or setback. *However*, as the wise Dalai Lama says:

“When you lose, don't lose the lesson.”

Regardless of what the actual challenge is, there will always be a lesson to learn and a chance to grow from the experience.

Just as practicing gratitude will help you cultivate a greater sense of appreciation, your ability to reframe challenges into learning experiences will guarantee that anything you face can become a stepping stone to achieving your goals. It's just a matter of stepping back and looking at the experience from an unbiased perspective.

But to see the obstacles for what they are, you first must accept their permanence. **You must admit that there is nothing you can do to change what has happened.** You know this, but sometimes it's easier to complain about problems instead of accepting them. But what good does that do? *ZERO GOOD!*

Use this section of the journal as a chance to reflect on the biggest challenge of the day and then tease out the lesson that can be learned from it. There is a lesson in everything, but you must be willing to honestly evaluate the circumstances before a genuine solution comes forward.

Here's how you might apply this to your challenges:

Today's greatest challenge was...

My coach was really hard on me today and yelled a lot. It was hard to stay calm and not let it get under my skin.

What did I learn from it?

*I can't control my coach's mood, only my response to it.
I have to practice keeping my composure in such moments.
- Another good reason to start meditating*

“Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.”

- WILLIAM JAMES

DAILY WINS

Even on my worst day, what went well?

It’s easy to cherry pick all the bad things we did in a day. Our brains are hard-wired to remember the experiences which caused us pain because that helps us survive and avoid the same failure in the future. But in the world of sports, where *most* of our fears are irrational, there isn’t much point in dwelling on them. If anything, failure is something you should be seeking out and finding ways to learn from it. Failure needs to become your friend because whether you like it or not, it’s not going away anytime soon.

So, instead of only focusing on the negatives, take the time to reflect on the good. Find that silver lining and seek out big or small wins. It can be something sports-related or simply from your everyday life. Use this as a chance to build yourself up brick-by-brick, instead of tearing yourself down with the wrecking ball of negative thoughts. Check out the example below:

THE DAILY WINS | What happened today? Any (big or little) wins?

Learned and applied new leadership strategies at practice today.

Ran into my favorite teacher from elementary school

BETTER THAN TODAY

What can I commit to now if I want a better tomorrow?

No matter what happens today, tomorrow is a fresh start. You could have had the worst day or the best, but when you wake up in the morning, it's a chance to wipe the slate clean.

Every evening before you go to bed you have an opportunity to use the past events and experiences from today as a means of shaping your tomorrow. By setting up your main priority the night before, you give yourself an immediate directive from the moment you wake up.

This question is designed to cope with the DAILY GROWTH question in the morning. It's a persistent reminder of what was left unfinished or what needs to be worked on next. This is what it looks like:

BETTER THAN TODAY | What can I improve upon or accomplish tomorrow?

Create an evening stretching routine.

Ask my coach what I could be doing to improve my leadership skills

WEEKLY CHALLENGES

A regular dose of different thinking

It takes a lot of hard work and dedication for a new action to become a consistent habit. But once it sticks, a new challenge presents itself. When something becomes a habit, you no longer have to *think* about it, and it simply becomes part of the routine. And for some things like driving, eating, or walking – a mindless routine is fine. But the same cannot be said for the tasks that are moving you towards your goals. If you truly want to improve and get the most out of your daily actions, you need to be focused, deliberate, and intentional. You cannot get stuck in the habit of just going through the motions.

The weekly challenges presented in this journal are intended to shake up your routine. Each one is designed to help you rethink your behaviors, re-evaluate your opinions or to consider new ways of living. Try them out and be sure to read each one with an open mind.

MY COMMITMENT

For something to stick and become a habit, you need to understand how our mind functions. Our brain likes routine and predictability, so if you expect to start a new habit, you should anticipate that your brain is going to fight its way back to normal. Whenever your brain learns something new, it creates a neural pathway so that next time it can quickly recall what it learned. This neural pathway cannot simply be erased. A stronger pathway must take over. So instead you must create a new more powerful pathway to override it.

The challenge of that comes in the early stages when the old habit is at its strongest, and the newest is weakest. To aid this process, it can be helpful to look for nudges or other means of assistance. One of the ways of doing this is through something called a ‘Commitment Device,’ which is an incentive that breeds commitment by turning an empty promise into a credible one.

Below you can fill in the blanks and create your own commitment device:

I, _____, commit to using *The Daily Athlete Journal* for the next five days straight. I’m doing this because it’s important to me and I believe it will...

If I make it five days in a row, I will reward myself with...

If I do not make it to five days, I promise to...

3 Ways I can ensure that I follow through with this commitment are...

Signature

Date

WASTE

no more time

ARGUING

what a good

PERSON

should be.

BE ONE.

MARCUS AURELIUS

Your First Weekly Challenge

Sometimes life can feel overwhelming. We look all around us and see nothing but absolute chaos. You've put on some extra weight, your coach is always yelling at you, and you got benched the last match. Not to mention the 20 other little things you need to get done this week. When you find yourself in this state, you see problems everywhere. Despite this fact, you may still think you have some solutions. The only problem is that you don't even know where to begin. Here's the first step: **Make your bed.**

It may seem unrelated, trivial, and irrelevant compared to everything else that needs to get done, but it's the first place you should start.

Here are three reasons why:

1) It's one of the easiest things to do

Next to maybe breathing, there are few tasks less challenging than making your bed. And given the fact that you say you are willing to do what it takes to succeed, not making your bed is nowhere near as challenging as what is to come. If we are brutally honest with ourselves when we skip making the bed, we are starting our day with a loss. If you can't handle the easy things, how on earth can you expect to overcome real difficulty? All you need to do is start; your brain already knows the rest.

2) It starts a chain reaction

When you start with making your bed, you set your mind and body into motion. When it's done, you'll look at your bed and instantly feel a sense of accomplishment and along with a little bit of clarity. You'll most likely be inspired to get started on the next thing and even find yourself cleaning the rest of your room, reading that book that's been collecting dust or getting yourself early to the gym.

3) It gives you a fail-safe

Some days suck, there's no way around it. You had a bad practice, you miss your family, you didn't sleep well the night before, or you didn't accomplish anything you set out to do that day. These days are inevitable, and they can be even more deflating when you come home to a messy living space and a bed that's never been made. When you make your bed in the morning, you give your future self a gift. A special treat that you can come home to at the end of a really bad day and say to yourself, "well I'm not a total failure, at least I made my bed."

This week's challenge is quite simple. Make your bed for the next seven days. That's it. Do it right now. See how you feel and take note of what happens after it's done.



HOURS OF SLEEP: ___ DATE: ___/___/___

How many hours of sleep last night?

(Start your morning

THE DAILY DOSE | Who or what am I grateful for? *with these 3 questions)*

THE DAILY GROWTH | What can I improve or do differently today?

THE DAILY 3 | Actions, tasks, or steps that will push me towards my goals:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



HOW WAS YOUR...

NUTRITION

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

TEAMWORK

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

EFFORT

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

STRESS

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ENERGY

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

JOY

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

(Finish the day with an evening reflection)

Today's greatest challenge was...

What did I learn from it?

DAILY WINS | What happened today? Any (big or little) wins?

BETTER THAN TODAY | What can I improve upon or accomplish tomorrow?
