

Future Champions Athlete Empowerment Program



Background

To be able to learn effectively, be adaptable and resilient and achieve at the highest levels in their sport in the future, emerging athletes within the talent pathways of sport, need to possess excellent physical literacy, a strong mental toolkit and good knowledge of what it takes to be an athlete.

The NSW Office of Sport has released three award winning e-learning courses for emerging athletes:

- ***Future Champions Holistic Athlete Program***
- ***Future Champions Athlete Mental Toolkit***
- ***Future Champions Nutrition for Athletes***

The courses are part of a suite of online courses supported through the NSW Government's Future Champions initiative, attending to key recommendations within its original strategy and subsequent First Action Plan - that of empowering emerging athletes within NSW and all who support them. For more information on the Future Champions strategy, please see <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/future-champions>.

All courses have been developed in collaboration with industry experts and feature contemporary and best-practice concepts and advice. They are designed to assist and empower the athlete to fulfill their sporting potential and importantly, support their physical and mental wellbeing, in and out of sport. The courses also importantly, empower the knowledge and application of their support providers including their coach, teacher, parent or service provider.

Informed by a best-practice approach to content creation and online learning, the courses combine theory and practice, facilitating an athlete's cognitive understanding, critical thinking and practical application of knowledge, strategies and skills to support their development and performance.

The Future Champions Athlete Empowerment courses address the critical needs of the emerging athlete and assist in equipping and empowering them with the right knowledge, skills and strategies to support them in and out of sport:



The courses are flexible, adaptive, and scalable. They cater to athletes within regional settings and from diverse sporting backgrounds and whom may have limited access to direct service support, including strength and conditioning, psychology, nutrition and recovery.

Key features of the courses:

- The content has been developed and delivered by subject matter experts.
- The courses are hosted within the LMS platform, Open Learning – a platform utilised by many Australian Universities featuring local hosting of data and stringent data protection and security.
- The courses feature language and concepts specific to athletes aged 12 years and over.
- The courses are self-paced and are flexible in delivery accommodating for the scheduling commitments of individual athletes – this is to ensure the athlete can get the best out of the courses and maximise their learning, whilst not overloading them.
- The courses are ‘portable’ through the downloadable Open Learning App and can be viewed ‘on the go’ by an athlete on their phone or tablet.
- Back-end ‘educator’ privileges and capability and class setup, allows teachers, coaches and managers to monitor the engagement of their athletes at a collective and individual level, provide feedback and encouragement, make announcements and evaluate an athlete’s progress.
- Athletes receive badges for each level completed and a certificate at the completion of each course.



Badges awarded to athletes for each level completed

Example Certificate



To enable effective implementation, the Pathways team at the Office of Sport provides direct advice and program management and technical support to schools and sporting organisations as well as direct assistance in onboarding their key stakeholders including coaches, athletes and parents.

The key to successfully implementing each course is educating and empowering the coach or teacher to oversee and provide guidance to their 'class' of athletes as to how best to incorporate the courses within an athlete's current schedule and enable them to utilise their new knowledge and skills within their regular training sessions and competition preparation.

Early implementation of the courses and feedback gained from stakeholders has demonstrated the great value of these courses to supporting the delivery of coaches and teachers as an 'off the shelf' product and supporting their own professional development.

The Holistic Athlete Program

The Holistic Athlete Program, is an engaging and evidence-based online course that facilitates an emerging athlete's physical literacy and supports their holistic development, learning and performance and importantly, empowers the knowledge and application of their support providers (e.g., coaches, teachers, parents, service support staff etc.)

The course was developed by Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) sports & exercise and musculoskeletal physiotherapist, Nicola Mepstead with support from experts in athlete development within the NSW Office of Sport and disciplinary experts within the NSW Institute of Sport and broader sector.

The course is groundbreaking in that it is the only online athlete physical literacy program specific to emerging athletes within the Australian system (not for profit) and possibly the international system!

The course content is aligned with the principles of the National Physical Literacy Framework developed by the Australian Sports Commission and the PDHPE syllabus of the Department of Education.

Why Physical Literacy?

Good physical literacy facilitates the holistic profile and integrated development of an emerging athlete and helps them grow and extend their physical capability and capacity as well as their knowledge of what it takes to be an athlete, their psycho-social and cognitive skills and strategies and wellbeing.

This is of primary importance for emerging athletes who are going through substantial changes in their physical, brain and cognitive development and who require tailored advice and support to embed effective strategies and skills (including strong self-regulation) and build them physically from 'the inside out'.

Poor physical literacy and poor management of the emerging athlete (i.e., overloading, provision of inappropriate advice and practices that are not a fit to their developing physicality etc.), has been linked to poor athlete retention and progression, burn-out and drop-out, and potential injury and illness.

Benefits of this course for the emerging athlete include:

- increasing their movement and cognitive competence and confidence, versatility, adaptability and resilience
- improving their understanding and application of key concepts within training and competition
- reducing potential injury
- supporting their retention, wellbeing, health and work towards future high-performance success.

The course provides:

- knowledge and tips of what it takes to become an elite athlete
- opportunities for the athlete to apply their learnings (e.g., quizzes, self-reflection opportunities etc.)
- opportunities for the athlete to share their progress with their coach and seek direct feedback
- guided activities using video, and instructions to help progress the athlete's skills.
- weekly session plans for the athlete and coach
- a large library of exercise videos, including multiple variations and progressions.

Within each level there are 7 integrated learning modules, and within the course, 6 levels of progression:



See Appendix 1 for a summary of each module across the six levels of the program.

Athletes can navigate their way through the course in several different ways, but it is highly recommended that they proceed level by level, starting at level 1 and progress, when appropriate and under the guidance of their respective coach or teacher, to level 6.

Each module has the same flow as demonstrated below:



Module Overview: Stability and Control



Introduction to Stability & Control Level 1



Build Your Knowledge



Core Stability



Develop Your Skills



Test Your Knowledge



Test Your Skills

- An '**Introduction Page**' detailing what specific knowledge and skills and strategies they will learn within the module.
- '**Develop Your Knowledge**' pages which facilitate the athlete's learning and application of key concepts through evidence-based and engaging commentary and interactive images etc.
- '**Develop Your Skills**' page which feature videos of key skills that the athlete needs to learn and practice with voiceover tips and an accompanying downloadable exercise checklist for them and their coach/teacher.
- Quizzes and exercises in the '**Test Your Knowledge**' page to test an athlete's learning and understanding.
- '**Test Your Skills**' page providing opportunity for athletes to upload a video of them demonstrating the skills they have learned and practiced within the module and receive feedback from their coach.

Stakeholder Testimonials

“

Easy to follow, very informative...use of videos and current (or ex) athletes very engaging and relatable... quizzes really reinforce learning and/or gaps in knowledge... great library of exercises to choose from...

”

“

It is really valuable in guiding students' training at home and giving them a checklist of skills they should be able to do to progress up each level.... my PDHPE classes have been increasingly engaged with the coordination tasks/challenges... these have been great introductory activities each session for them to improve on each week.

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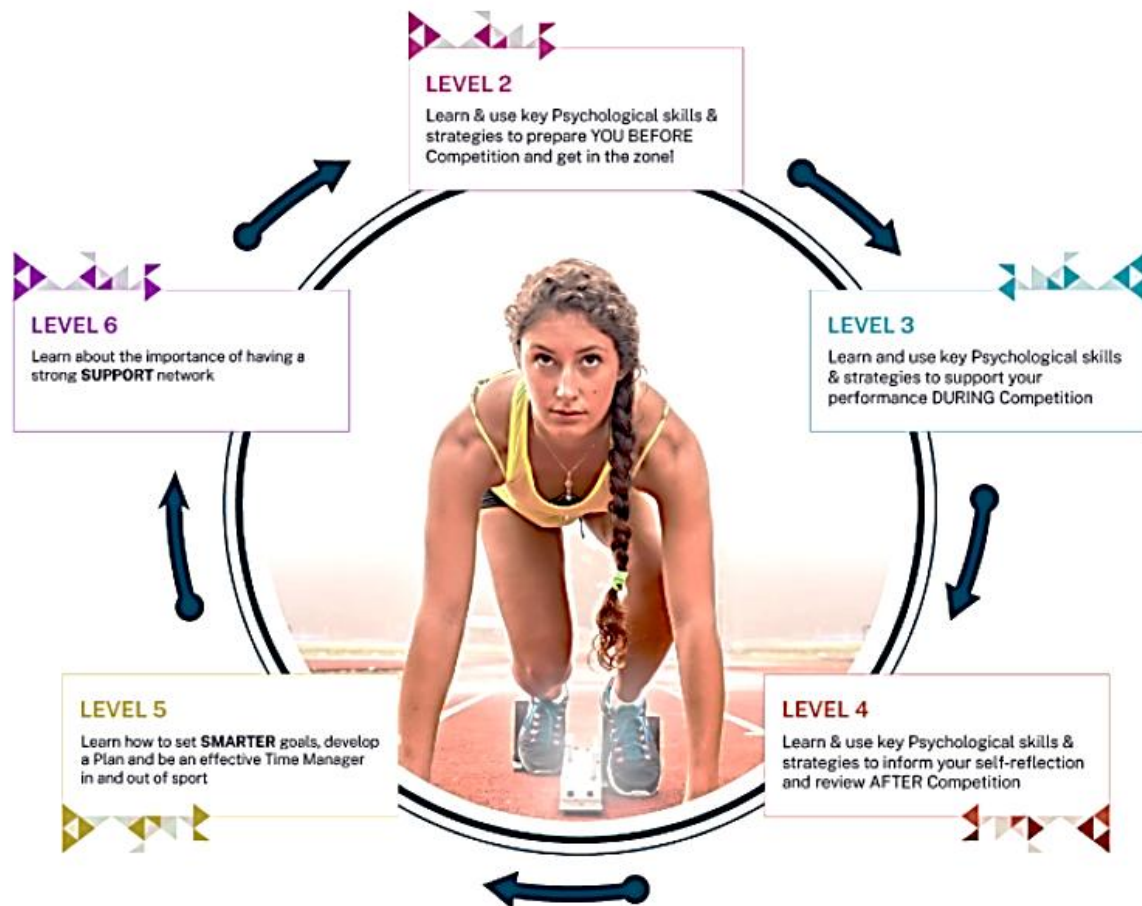
The Athlete Mental Toolkit

The Athlete Mental Toolkit is a course designed to empower the emerging athlete and all who support them in building and implementing their 'Mental Toolkit' and complements the Holistic Athlete Program by providing best-practice guidance specific to key psychological skills and strategies.

The course utilises an evidence-based and practical approach for empowering the emerging athlete to build and apply their psychological skills and strategies to support them in and out of sport.

Content for the program was developed by sport psychologist and NSWIS affiliate practitioner, Fiona McCarthy.

The design and flow of this course (as depicted in the diagram below) has been built to replicate what key strategies and skills an emerging athlete should implement before, during and after training and competition and to consolidate their goal setting, time management and support network:



Like the Holistic Athlete Program, athletes can navigate their way through the course in several different ways, but it is highly recommended that they proceed level by level (e.g., 1 to 6 in sequence).

The course provides:

- short and practical information and advice to support the athlete and their coach
- opportunities for the athlete to self-reflect and implement the key skills they have learned
- opportunities for the athlete to receive direct feedback and encouragement from their coach
- numerous downloadable resources that an athlete can use and implement straight away including self-reflection, self-talk and SMARTER goal setting templates.



INFORMATION

Keys tips on how to imagine effectively

Images can be classified into two distinct categories based on the senses involved and visual perspective utilized. You are probably most familiar with “external” images, or the visual perspective you would experience watching your body performing a skill from outside of it (like a video). On the other hand, in an “internal” image, you would create a visual image of the surroundings as if you were looking through your eyes.

01

Begin any imagery with a relaxation technique. For example you can use centring breathing which involves the diaphragm in between your lungs and abdominal muscles. You could follow the breathing pattern of ‘in for a count of 4’, ‘hold for a count of 2’ and ‘exhale for a count of 4’.



02

Get yourself in a comfortable position, for example laying down, sitting up or maybe even standing.

03

Combine the use of positive-key statements e.g., like smooth and flow or whatever words relate to the skill you are imagining.

This can reinforce and strengthen the mental rehearsal.



04



Practising the skill physically before using imagery can allow you to know how a skill ‘feels’ and what is required to execute it.

However, imagery can also be used to learn a skill before doing it in real life. For example, a diver may mentally break a dive that has a high degree of difficulty up into ‘pieces’ and imagine themselves executing those pieces of the skill one piece at a time before physically doing the dive. The mind is getting ‘prepared’ to become familiar with what is required to execute the dive in real life.

**EXERCISE****Mind Over Matter: The Winning Mindset****Instructions:**

1. Think or imagine an aspect of your sporting technique that you would like to improve (e.g. spiking down the line in volleyball, serving in tennis or shooting in basketball).
2. Observe and absorb. Watch skilled athletes perform one of your favorite chosen skills to understand proper technique and execution.
3. Then in your minds eye, do a mental rehearsal of you performing the skill - you could do it from different perspectives, e.g. watching you do the skill or from your eye view doing the skill - work out which is the best fit for you.
4. Keep practicing imagining yourself doing the skill until you can do it successfully in your minds eye.
That might take a bit of practice!
5. Before training for a competition, set aside dedicated time to imagine yourself doing the skill successfully - it might be in the changerooms, or in your warm-up.
6. As well as imagining performing a skill well, you can also use your imagination to prepare for an event, the crowd, the pressure, and the feeling of success. Many of our greatest athletes use their imagination to prepare like this so that it feels familiar their confidence is boosted and they are ready to go!

To develop their mental toolkit, it is advised that athletes should take their time and work through each level to:

- understand the information presented
- reflect on their own (and other's) psychological skills and strategies
- challenge themselves with each activity
- implement these skills and strategies within their regular preparation and performance within their sport.

Just like a physical or technical skill, emerging athletes are required to practice their psychological skills and strategies to develop and refine them.

Possessing a strong 'mental toolkit' will not only support the emerging athlete's learning, self-regulation and performance within their sport, but will also greatly support their learning and performance in other areas (e.g., school, vocation etc.) and are recognised as key life skills!

Athlete Testimonials

“

After completing this course, I believe I have really developed my knowledge on mental and psychological skills. ... The skills I have learnt have already proved themselves beneficial as I have implemented them into pre-game preparations and post- game routines at recent competitions. I am excited to use more techniques in the future to help me become a stronger athlete.

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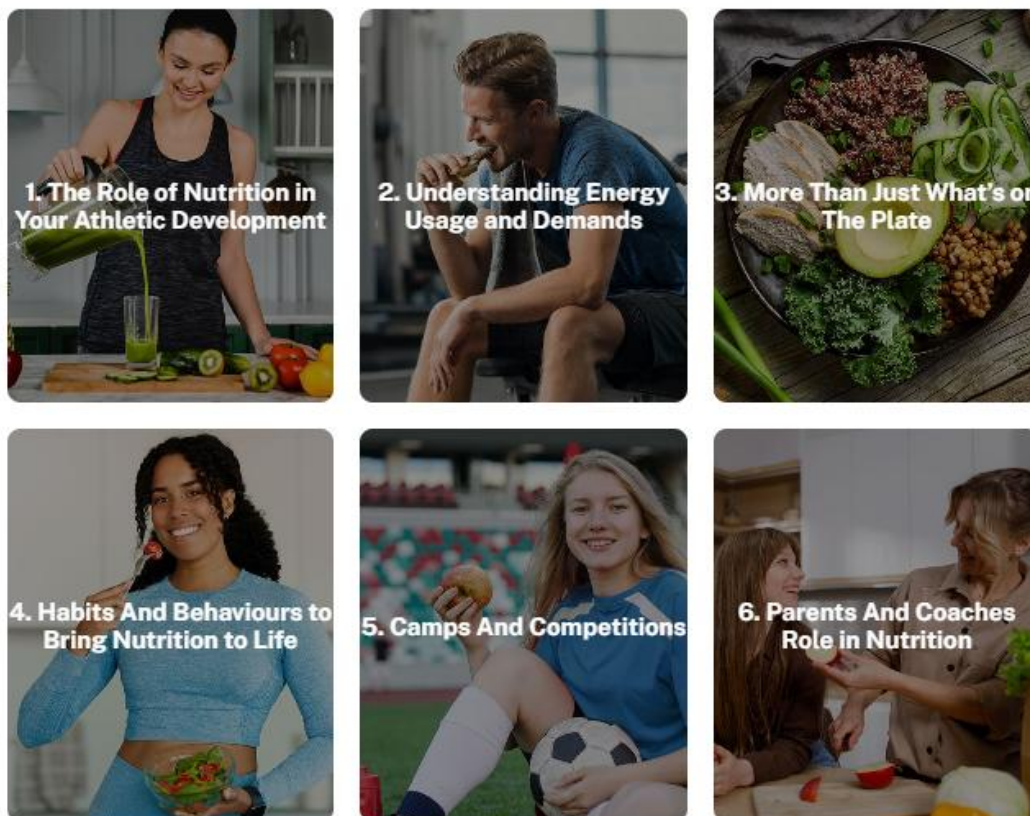
This course was helpful and clearly outlined mental practices and strategies to help with psychological problems during practice and competitions and has showed me the importance of understanding and overcoming these mental blocks.

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The Nutrition for Athletes Course

The Nutrition for Athletes course is designed to empower the emerging athlete with the right fit of knowledge, skills and strategies to facilitate their utilisation of good nutrition and hydration practices and habits, in and out of sport.

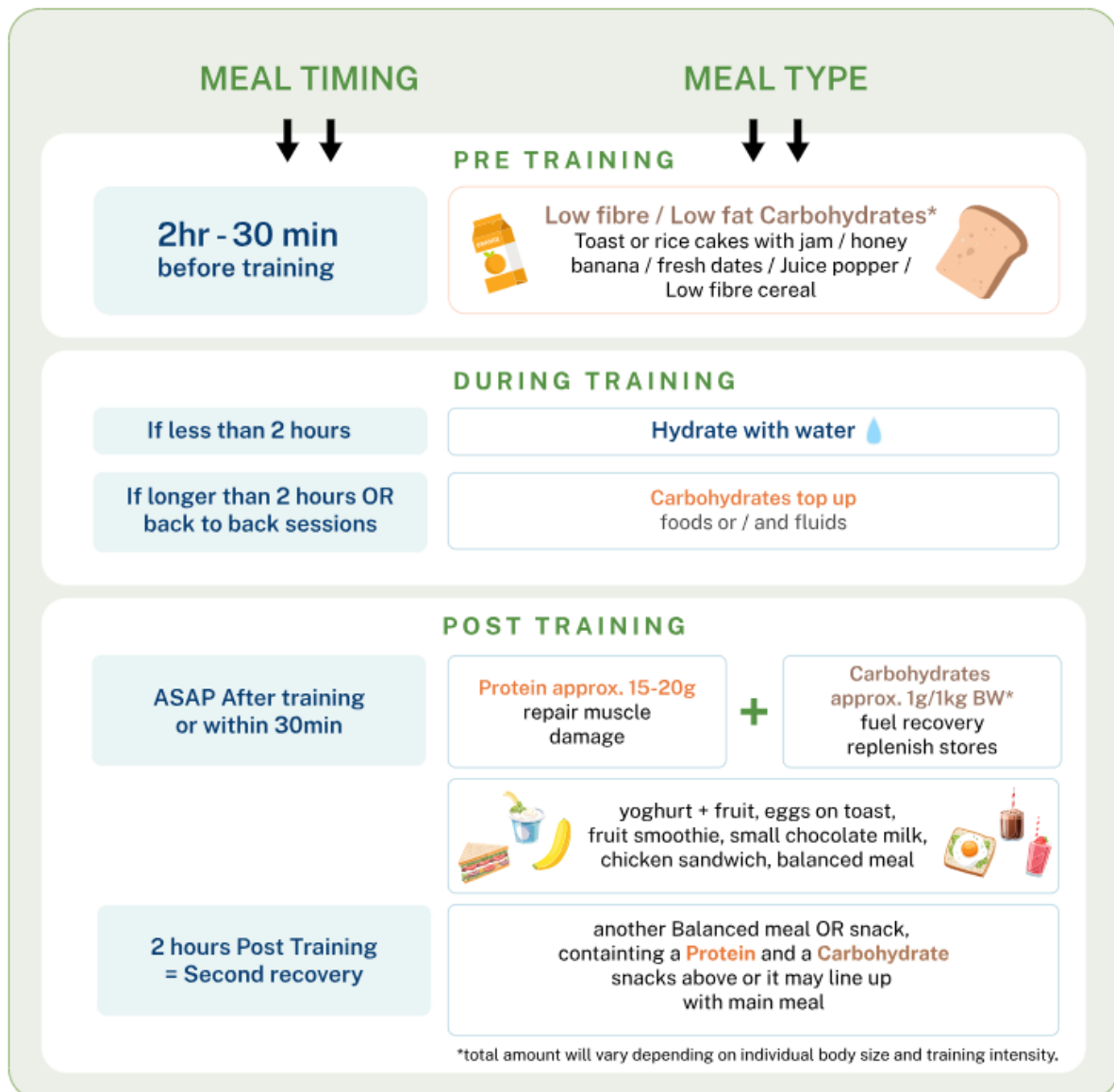
The learning design and content for the program was developed by Advanced Sports Dietician and Olympic and Paralympic practitioner and consultant, Sally Walker.



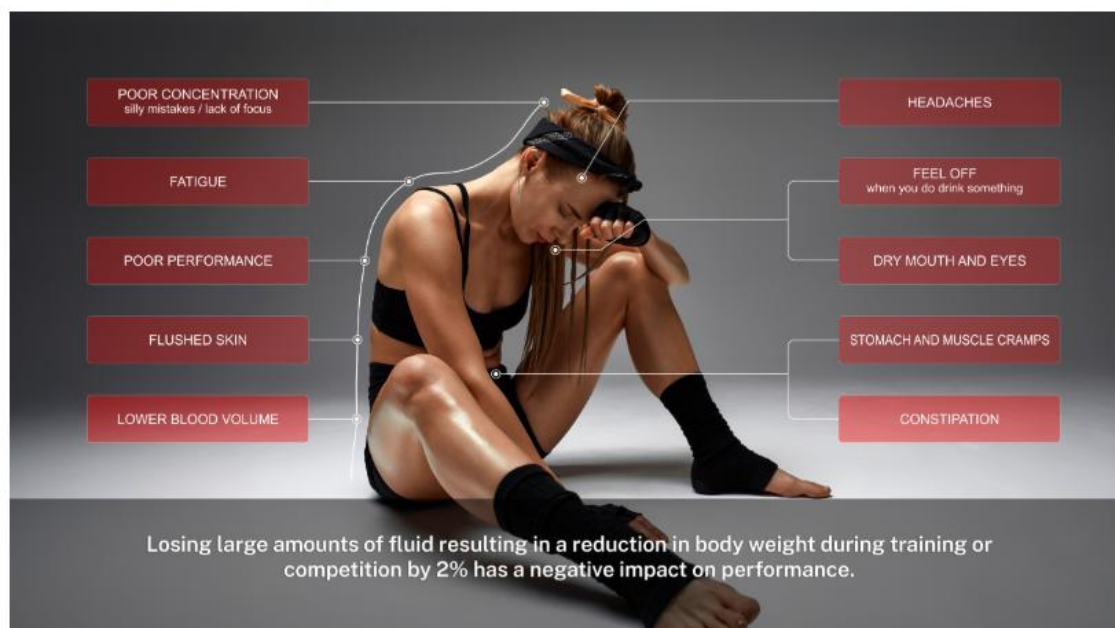
Like the Holistic Athlete Program and Athlete Mental Toolkit, the course has 6 progressive levels. Athletes can navigate their way through the course in several different ways, but it is highly recommended that they proceed level by level (e.g., 1 to 6 in sequence).

The course also features dedicated and tailored advice for parents and coaches and podcasts that athletes can download and listen to, at the end of each level, to recap on key knowledge and strategies they have learned.

The underpinning philosophy and design of the course, whereby the athlete is empowered and supported to make their own nutritional decisions and strategies specific to their individual needs and context, rather than generic prescription, is a first within the Australian system, if not internationally.



These are all signs from the body that act as reminders to increase our load and rate of fluid intake.

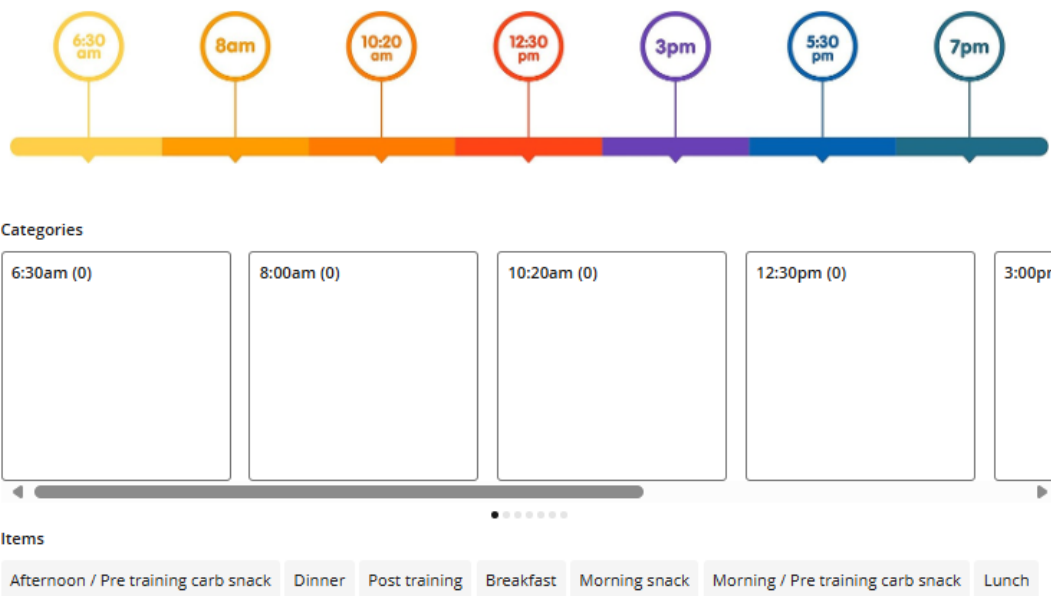


Through this approach, the course empowers the athlete's self-awareness of what their immediate needs are for their training intensity, camps, travel and competition and promotes a proactive approach to planning and preparation. This approach empowers the emerging athlete's self-regulation, facilitating effective decision making and self-organisation as well as embedding good lifelong habits to support their health and wellbeing.

Activity

If you are in a high training load and afternoon training starts at 4:15pm, what meals can you match to the times below to effectively fuel your body for the whole day?

Drag and drop your meals into each time period.



The activity interface consists of a timeline with time slots and a list of meal categories to drag and drop into those slots.

Timeline Time Slots:

- 6:30 am
- 8am
- 10:20 am
- 12:30 pm
- 3pm
- 5:30 pm
- 7pm

Categories:

6:30am (0)	8:00am (0)	10:20am (0)	12:30pm (0)	3:00pm

Items:

- Afternoon / Pre training carb snack
- Dinner
- Post training
- Breakfast
- Morning snack
- Morning / Pre training carb snack
- Lunch

Awards and Recognition

2024

- **Winner: LearnX Diamond Award (Australia)**
Best Learning & Talent Development | People and Performance Category

2025

- **Finalist: AITD Awards (Australia)**
Best Capability Development Program
- **Nominated: NSW Premiers Award (Australia)**
- **Nominated: Learning Elite Awards (International)**
- **Finalist: LearnX Awards (Australia)** – award to be announced Nov 2025
 - *Best Learning Model*
 - *Best Learning and Development*

For more information on the *Future Champions Athlete Empowerment Program* please contact the NSW Office of Sport: futurechampions@sport.nsw.gov.au

Appendix 1

The Holistic Athlete Program content presented within this matrix is equivalent to two years of athlete training:

MODULES	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Strength	- Fundamentals of strength training: what, why, how - Anatomy basics	- Benefits of strength training - Progressing a strength program	- Benefits of strength training - Intensity and strength training	- Define motor control - Identify learning preferences for different situations or people	Resilience and motivation: definition and relevance	Collaboration and Coaching: Partnerships and working together
Conditioning	- Fundamentals of conditioning training: what, why, how - Collect Baseline testing	- Benefits of conditioning - Basics of Running - Focus on development of Aerobic capacity	- Introduce Aerobic-lactic training - Define athleticism - Discuss different sports athleticism requirements	- Introduce Aerobic-lactic training - Focus on Acceleration & Deceleration - Speed vs Accuracy	- Define Fatigue: mental vs physical fatigue - Discuss pain fundamentals - Introduce circuit training	- Confidence: definition, relevance & building it - Focus on specificity of conditioning for each athlete/ sport
Coordination	Fundamentals of coordination: types, components	Jumping and Landing skills: force production/ absorption	- Tumbling: falling, rolling, sliding - Introduce Skill acquisition	- Define agility - Explore the relevance to complex motor skills	- Improving coordination, including techniques - Link fatigue & coordination	- Discuss Decision-making in sport - Discuss Responsibility – implications and relevance
Stability & Balance	- Fundamentals of stability, control, balance - Introduce Core stability/ activation	- Discuss different forms of stability: focus lumbopelvic & trunk stability - Discuss basics of posture	Define and link proprioception & spatial awareness	Discuss Peripheral stability: ankle & shoulder	- Attention skills - Relaxation strategies, incl. breathing techniques	- Define Specificity - Relevance of specificity
Flexibility & Mobility	Fundamentals of flexibility and mobility	- Stretching types - Basic principles of stretching	- Mobility options - Basic principles of mobility	Benefits of flexibility & mobility	Time-management, including strategies	- Individualised flexibility & mobility - Individual Preparation
Injury Prevention	- Define Injury Prevention - Identify risk factors - Introduction to Mental Health	- Discuss what is & the relevance of Injury prevention - Benefit to athletes	Outline the components of an Injury prevention program & relation to risk minimisation	Basic first-aid and injury management	Review sport specific injury prevention programs	Self-direction: Design an injury prevention program
Recovery	Discuss the fundamentals of recovery	Sleep: importance, sleep hygiene	Introduce passive Recovery strategies	Introduce additional Recovery strategies	Discuss meditation & mindfulness	- Sport-life balance - Athlete burnout