ATHLETE CAREER PLAYBOOK / 2026

Beyond the Game

The athlete career playbook

Start where you are

You have a life beyond the roster. Let's make the experience you already have useful for the opportunity you want next.

Maybe you are balancing competition and classes. Maybe your sport ended before you expected. Or you have been working for years and want a different direction. You do not need to make your whole career decision today. Choose one question and build something you can use.

Choose the route that fits today

- Still competing: choose one real contribution from sport, work, study, or community life. Draft a resume statement and fit one career conversation around your actual schedule.
- Leaving competitive sport: identify what you want from work, compare two opportunities, and check what preparation each requires before spending money on training.
- Already in the workforce: lead with recent work evidence. Use an athletic example when it adds something relevant; explore growth, a return to work, or a change without assuming you must start over.

Your work to keep

By working through this playbook, you can create a contribution record, a resume statement, an interview outline, a comparison of two opportunities, an outreach message, and a next-action plan. Complete the part you need first. Come back for the rest.

Your starting question

What do you need to explain, decide, or prepare for right now?

Start with the life you actually have: income needs, caring responsibilities, access needs, transport, available training, and time. No degree, captain's title, scholarship, or professional playing history is required to use this guide.

BEYOND THE GAME / 02

Find the contribution inside the experience

"I'm a team player" is a starting claim. The useful part is what you did when another person depended on you.

Choose one moment. What was happening? What part was yours? What did you do? What happened afterward, or what did you learn? A team win does not establish that your individual action caused it. Keep your claim at the scale you can explain.

A reserve player has evidence, too

Fictional example: preparation without a title

> A reserve player noticed new teammates were unsure of the approved equipment-return procedure. After checking with staff, the player walked them through the steps and checked that items were returned correctly. The action shows clear instruction and follow-through. It does not establish staff supervision or responsibility for the whole program.

Use a contribution record

- Situation: name the specific problem or responsibility, without unnecessary team jargon.
- My part: distinguish your task from the coach's decisions and the team's work.
- Action: describe the steps someone could observe you taking.
- Outcome or learning: report what you observed. If you do not know the result, say what remains unknown.
- Evidence: note an accurate recollection, permitted work sample, completed checklist, or feedback you can consult. Remove private team, employer, and personal information.

Try your own

One action I took, the result or learning, and what supports my account:

Your strongest example may come from a paid shift, family responsibility, apprenticeship, class project, or community activity. Athletic participation is one source of experience; it is not automatic proof of every workplace skill.

BEYOND THE GAME / 03

Name the skill behind the action

A transferable skill is a capability you can use in another setting. Start with an action you can explain, then check where that capability is relevant.

Use these prompts to find a possible connection. They do not establish proficiency. Your evidence may come from sport, paid work, a skilled trade, caring, study, or community life.

- Instructing / Active Listening: you explained an approved routine and checked understanding. What did the other person need, and what could they do afterward?
- Coordination: you organized your part of a shared responsibility. Who depended on it, and how did you communicate a change?
- Critical Thinking: you compared information before choosing a step. What options did you consider, and why did you choose that approach?
- Active Learning: you used feedback to change how you worked. What did you change, and what did you observe or learn?
- Time Management: you planned competing commitments and handled a conflict. How did you prioritize, communicate, and follow through?

These are possible starting points. A recent work example may be stronger than an old athletic story. If another skill fits better, name it in your own words and identify the action that demonstrates it.

My skill-to-evidence connection

The skill I can explain / one action that supports it / the work task it may connect to:

Compare the connection with an actual opportunity. Explaining a routine can support a communication example; it does not establish a required licence or experience with software you have not used.

Build your skill record and carry it into Story Studio

Skills vocabulary: O*NET OnLine, USDOL/ETA

O*NET 31.0 Database

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Skill names are drawn from the O*NET 31.0 Database, USDOL/ETA, under CC BY 4.0. ER III created the prompts and examples; USDOL/ETA has not approved, endorsed, or tested them.

BEYOND THE GAME / 04

Write a resume statement someone can picture

Keep your actual role. Translate the action. Explain the result without inflating it.

Use this structure: action + task or problem + relevant outcome or learning. Choose language the employer uses only when it accurately describes your work. You do not need a percentage for a contribution to be specific.

Fictional example: current athlete

Broad: "Hardworking student-athlete with leadership skills."

Clearer: "Explained the staff-approved equipment-return procedure to new teammates and checked that their items were returned correctly."

Connection to investigate: following a process and communicating instructions. This does not demonstrate a required licence, software skill, or supervisory qualification.

Fictional example: former athlete, recent work

Broad: "Former athlete who performs under pressure."

Clearer: "Organized unresolved customer requests into a shift-handoff list and briefed the incoming colleague on next actions."

Use the recent job under its real title. The example stands on the work performed, without an athletic claim.

Place the experience where it belongs

A current athlete with limited work history might include an Athletics or Relevant Experience section. A former athlete with substantial employment can give recent relevant work more space and retain sport briefly when useful. Include accurate dates and titles; do not rename playing experience as a management job.

Use clear headings and readable text. Follow the application's file instructions and check the saved document's text and layout. An AI rewrite or an online score cannot establish that you meet the job requirements.

Your draft

Write one statement, then underline the words you could support in a conversation.

Draft from your evidence in Career Story Studio

BEYOND THE GAME / 05

Tell the story, then answer the follow-up

Prepare a few cues you can explain naturally. Let the question guide which example you choose.

STAR is an organizing method: Situation, Task, Action, Result. A result can be a completed task, observed progress, or a specific lesson. If work is still in progress, keep that visible.

Fictional answer: "Tell me about a time you helped someone learn."

Situation: New teammates were unsure how to return equipment after practice.

Task: I offered to help them follow the existing procedure; I was not in charge of equipment operations.

Action: I confirmed the instructions with staff, explained the steps in plain language, and checked the returned items with the teammates.

Result: They completed the returns correctly during that session. I learned to check understanding rather than assume my explanation was clear.

Make the connection without stretching it

You might add: "That experience is relevant to explaining a documented process. I would still need to learn your system and complete any required training." A connection is more credible when you can also name what the example does not demonstrate.

- Can I explain my individual responsibility and credit other people?
- What made my approach appropriate? What would I change?
- Does this example answer the question, or am I forcing it?
- Could a listener understand it without knowing my sport?

Practice cues

Situation / my responsibility / my action / outcome or learning:

Say it aloud. Ask someone to tell you what they understood about your contribution. Revise the unclear part rather than memorizing a more impressive script.

Build and rehearse an interview story

BEYOND THE GAME / 06

Compare opportunities you could actually pursue

Sport does not assign you a career. Start with the work you want to investigate and the preparation it requires.

Use Next Move to explore work activities and shortlist directions. Then check an occupation's O*NET profile and real, current postings in a location or arrangement you could use. A reflection game is not a validated career-fit test or a qualification decision.

Check two opportunities side by side

- Work: what tasks would you perform, and do you want to try them?
- Requirements: distinguish required qualifications from preferences. Check licences, education, experience, technical skills, and any stated conditions directly.
- Evidence: what have you actually done that connects to those tasks?
- Gap: what is missing, and who can confirm an acceptable preparation route?
- Feasibility: check advertised pay, schedule, location, travel, accessibility, transport, and training costs against your needs.
- Next step: apply where appropriate, ask a clarifying question, or investigate a specific preparation route. Keep the posting link and your reason.

Fictional comparison

> A former athlete with customer-service experience is comparing an office-support opening and a licensed occupation. Their handoff example may support a communication requirement in the first posting; they still need to check its software and experience requirements. It does not replace the licence required by the second. The next step is to verify the first role's criteria and investigate the second role's approved training route, not apply to both on the strength of being an athlete.

O*NET preparation information describes occupations broadly. An employer's current requirements and any relevant licensing authority still need checking. If you do not hold a degree, look for routes accepting your actual preparation; do not assume a degree preference and a mandatory licence are interchangeable.

Explore directions in Next Move

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Ask for information you can act on

A useful connection starts with a specific question and respect for the other person's time.

Template: current athlete exploring a field

> Hello [name], I'm [name], currently competing in [sport/context] and exploring [field]. Your work in [specific area] caught my attention. Could you share what an entry route usually looks like and one task a newcomer should learn about? I'm happy to send a few questions by email if that is easier. Thank you for considering it.

Template: former athlete changing direction

> Hello [name], I'm exploring a move from [current work] into [field]. My recent experience includes [one relevant contribution]. I saw your work on [specific topic] and would value your perspective on the preparation employers actually expect. Would you be open to a brief conversation or a few questions by email? Thank you.

Bring questions that improve your decision

- What does a newcomer actually do in a typical week?
- Which requirements are essential before applying, and what is normally learned on the job?
- What work sample or experience would help me understand whether this path fits?

Start with people you have a legitimate reason to contact: a former teammate, colleague, campus career-service contact, professional association member, or someone whose public work connects to your question. Shared sport can open a conversation; it does not create an obligation to help or hire you.

After a conversation, thank the person, name one useful point, and carry out an agreed next step. If you follow up on an unanswered message, keep it brief and respectful; do not repeatedly pressure someone for a response.

Make it yours

Who will I contact, what do I want to learn, and why this person?

Shape an introduction and outreach draft

BEYOND THE GAME / 08

Build the next piece of evidence

When a gap is real, choose an action that helps you learn something before making a bigger commitment.

Still competing: work around the season

Choose a small action that fits a real opening in your schedule: speak with a career adviser, ask about flexible work experience, or complete a sample task using public or invented data. Confirm employer hours and commitments directly. An opportunity that clashes with essential responsibilities is not practical just because it sounds impressive.

Transitioning out: test the work, not the label

Pick a task from a current posting. Ask someone in the field how it is done, try an appropriate beginner exercise, and compare what you enjoyed with what was difficult. A practice task gives you information; it does not become professional experience or a credential. Ask about accessible, affordable preparation before paying for a program.

Already working: connect to your current level

For growth, identify a responsibility you want to discuss and gather recent evidence. For a change or return to work, check which capabilities transfer and which requirements need updating. A paid-work example may be more useful than a story from a season years ago. You can keep sport as part of your identity while choosing evidence relevant to today.

Fictional experiment: coordination work

> An athlete considering office coordination creates a sample appointment log using invented names and times, checks it for conflicts, and asks a practitioner which tools a real role uses. Keep it labeled "Practice project." The deliverable is the log plus feedback and a clearer preparation question, not a claim of office employment.

If you are leaving sport unexpectedly, give yourself room to find support as well as a career direction. Campus or community support services and trusted people can help you identify the kind of support you want.

Choose a manageable experiment

What will I try, what will I keep, and what would make me continue or reconsider?

BEYOND THE GAME / 09

Your next-move worksheet

Use a notebook or print this page. Finish with something specific enough to put on your calendar.

Download an editable action worksheet

1. My direction or question

What opportunity, responsibility, or decision am I investigating?

2. My evidence

Which contribution will I use? What can I honestly support?

3. My requirement check

What must I verify? Keep a posting, source, or person to consult.

4. My next action

What will I do, when will it fit, and what access or support do I need?

5. What I will keep

A revised resume statement, story outline, posting comparison, message, or work sample:

6. My review

When will I review it? What response, feedback, or new information will guide my next decision?

An unanswered message is information about that attempt, not a verdict on your potential. Record what happened, adjust the action, and decide whether to try another route. Keep evidence of progress separate from a hoped-for result.

BEYOND THE GAME / 10

Turn the playbook into work you can keep

Choose the tool that matches your next task. Your own experience stays at the center.

Career Story Studio: resume draft

Enter your situation, responsibility, action, outcome or learning, and evidence. Connect them to a real opportunity. Edit all four versions and review the facts before downloading your text packet. Use the interview or networking links in this guide for those purposes.

Next Move: career exploration and passport

Explore work scenarios and real occupation titles. Shortlist directions, review preparation information, and record a practical experiment. Download your Quest Passport. The shortlist is a starting point for research, not a promise of fit or employment.

No account or email is required for these tools. Writing is processed in your browser; device saving is optional. Keep your downloads if you want a lasting copy. Do not enter confidential team, employer, or personal records.

Tell Edward what helped

You can report a clearer career direction, a resume revision, an interview, or something that needs work. Feedback is optional and self-reported; a positive outcome does not establish that this guide caused it.

Selected references and further support

The references below support further learning. The exercises and fictional examples in this playbook are original ER III teaching material. Linked organizations do not endorse this independent resource.

Biola University: explaining athletic experience on a resume

James Madison University: student-athlete career resources

NCAA After the Game Career Center: former NCAA athletes

O*NET OnLine: occupational preparation and Job Zones

For more practical guides and tools, return to eriii.com. Bring your draft and questions when you are ready for another perspective.

More guides and personal career support