

INSPIRATION

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Hard Work, Competition & The Grind

Robby Naish

Photo by Darrell Wong

Hard Work, Competition & The Grind

A Mental Training Guide for Athletes, Performers and Coaches

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I'll grow it, push it, have fun reinventing myself.
But the things I have passion for always cycle back."*

— Robby Naish

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Chasing Consistency. Accept Love. Be Grateful, Excited and Devoted.

Introduction

Hard Work, Competition & The Grind

A Mental Training Guide for Athletes, Performers and Coaches

This guide exists because most people get hard work wrong.

They confuse effort with progress. They confuse exhaustion with excellence. They grind without direction, compete without presence, and recover without purpose. Then they wonder why the results do not match the hours.

What follows is a framework for doing the work that actually matters. Not just the physical reps, but the mental ones. The breathing. The focus. The rituals that separate athletes who sustain from athletes who flame out. The internal discipline that turns a packed schedule into a competitive advantage instead of a slow collapse.

The GED Foundation

The principles in this guide are built on the GED Foundation — Gratitude, Excitement, Devotion — and anchored by Accept Love, the philosophy that removes guilt, judgment, and the need to catch up. Together they create a mental operating system that works under pressure, travels anywhere, and holds up over a lifetime.

Gratitude = Awareness of the Why. What you want to accomplish in the face of a challenge. If you train your brain to feel grateful, you will be provided with the clarity to know what you want to accomplish, the courage to move forward and the trust in your ability to embrace the challenge.

Excitement = Acceptance of the Demands. The strength of your conviction in the face of the challenge. If you train for the right energy, you will be able to settle down, be present and access the skills and power required to perform at your best under pressure.

Devotion = Commitment to Balance. The self-discipline to balance the awareness of what you want with the acceptance of the energy required to get the job done. Devotion provides the self-discipline to use the HiLevel Tools and Techniques that enable you to maintain the effort and get better at what you love to do when it matters most.

Robby Naish: Grateful, Excited and Devoted

Throughout this guide, you will see the career of Robby Naish woven into the teaching. Twenty-four world titles. Over 150 event victories across multiple disciplines. More than fifty years of showing up on the water. Naish is not referenced because he is famous. He is referenced because he is the living example of every principle in this guide — smart-hard work, aggressive focus, consistency over heroics, a portable mental game, and a deep love for the process itself.

At age 62 he continues to push the limits and perform at the highest level of what is possible. As a kid he was the youngest-ever professional athlete and now he is the oldest. Red Bull pays him to be him. Robby Naish is grateful, excited and devoted.

Grateful. In his words: “I’m grateful for the opportunities I’ve had and have. I’ve been in the right place at the right time, and so thankful... In windsurfing, kitesurfing and standup, I’ve been able to throw myself into them completely and benefit professionally and personally.”

To be Robby’s friend is to be amazed at how success has not changed him. He has the same level of humility that he had at 15.

Excited. “I’m excited that I can still prepare myself for the challenges of my busy life. My only challenge really is to be mentally up for dealing with the challenges on land: the hassles of the crowd, the traffic, the social media and occasionally... the politics. Once I’m in the water, I’m fine. My skills have not diminished.”

A word to the wise — to compare yourself to Robby is foolish. It is best to be inspired by his example and apply what you learn to your own life.

Devoted. “I’m devoted to doing the work: the travel, the complexity of my professional and personal life and the overall demands on my time and energy. It’s all worth it. For me to be able to do what I love to do at the best of my ability is all of the reward I need!”

Robby is the definition of being able to embrace challenges. That is HiLevel.

The Full Picture

While at Punahou, Naish had the German teacher teach him to speak German so he could do commercials throughout Europe. Then he traveled for windsurfing. There were course boards, a slalom board and wave boards — two of each. Several masts, sails, booms and all of the equipment he needed. Standing in his yard, I watched him pack, put all the stickers on his sails for Red Bull and the rest of his sponsors. He negotiated all of his sponsorships himself. He had trained his mind to handle everything it took to rule the sport and every sport that followed.

That is the whole picture. Not just the athlete on the water. The student learning a language for business. The professional managing his own brand. The competitor packing his own gear. Naish did not separate the logistics from the performance. It was all one thing. It was all the work. And that is the

mentality this guide is built to teach.

This guide is written for the athlete balancing multiple commitments, the performer navigating high-pressure environments, the coach building culture, and anyone who wants to understand what real hard work looks like from the inside out. Whether you are thirteen or sixty-two, the principles are the same. Show up with intention. Train the mind as hard as the body. Trust the process. Let it flow.

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Hard Work

Everybody talks about hard work. It gets thrown around like it explains itself. It does not.

Hard work is not just effort. It is intentional effort aligned with purpose. Without direction, hard work is just fatigue disguised as discipline.

Smart-Hard

I see it all the time. Athletes grinding themselves into the ground with volume and intensity, never getting better, because the work is not directed. Every rep needs a target. Every session needs a purpose. Effort for the sake of effort is not a plan.

Robby Naish won his first windsurfing world championship at thirteen years old. He went on to win 24 world titles and over 150 events across windsurfing, kiteboarding, and stand-up paddleboarding. He did not get there by grinding blindly. Every session on the water had a target. Every new discipline he entered, he studied it, trained it with purpose, and competed with intention. That is smart-hard.

The Mental Work

The real hard work is mental. It is the willingness to look at your tendencies honestly. To sit with discomfort in a debrief. To accept feedback without defending yourself. Your body will do what your mind has trained it to do. And what your mind has trained it to avoid.

Here is a core principle I teach. Your strengths become your liabilities under pressure. The aggressive competitor becomes reckless. The careful planner becomes paralyzed. The passionate performer becomes emotional. Knowing your tendencies, really knowing them, is the edge that separates consistent performers from talented people who cannot get out of their own way.

Consistency Over Heroics

One monster practice does not mean much. One great game does not define you. Showing up with controlled passion day after day. That is the real grind. That is the Excitement piece of the GED Foundation. Channeling energy with intention, not just burning it. The athlete who brings the same focused intensity to a Tuesday practice as they do to a championship. That is the one doing the hard work.

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Naish is 62 years old and still windsurfing nearly every windy day at Ho'okipa on Maui. Not for a camera. Not for a sponsor. Because the process is the point. That is consistency over heroics. That is a lifetime of showing up.

The Work Nobody Sees

Here is the part most people miss. Hard work includes the discipline of recovery. Knowing when to back off. Trusting the process. Sometimes the hardest work is not pushing harder. That is Devotion. Discipline and trust in the process. Knowing when rest, recovery, and reflection are the most productive things you can do.

Hard work toward what? Guided by what awareness? Sustained by what philosophy? Without that, it is just sweat.

Aggressive Focus

I learned this working with a downhill skier. At 70 miles per hour there is no half-speed. You are either attacking the mountain or the mountain is attacking you. There is no room for hesitation. No room for second-guessing. The moment you pull back, you lose.

Aggressive focus is not rage. It is not reckless. It is total commitment with zero hesitation. It is the ability to lock in on what needs to happen right now and execute without reservation. Settle-Down breathing gets you ready. But when it is go time, it is aggressive focus or nothing.

Naish is known for his powerful charges through the water with a technique no other board sailor can match. Whether it was triangle racing, slalom, waves, or freestyle, he dominated every aspect of windsurfing because he attacked with full commitment. He did not ease into a wave. He did not hedge on a line. He committed. That is aggressive focus. It is what happens when preparation meets presence and you let it rip.

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This applies to every sport and every stage. The paddler who commits fully to every stroke. The receiver who attacks the ball in a crowd. The musician who plays with complete conviction. The volleyball setter who trusts the read and delivers.

Some athletes think being careful is the safe play. It is not. Careful under pressure becomes tentative. Tentative becomes slow. Slow gets you beat. Aggressive focus is the safe play. Full commitment protects you because your body and mind are fully engaged, not second-guessing.

The Training Start

How you start determines how you perform. Every practice, every session, every rehearsal, every game. The first few minutes set the tone for everything that follows. If you show up scattered, you perform scattered. If you show up locked in, you compete locked in.

The Training Start is a deliberate ritual that transitions you from whatever you were doing before into a state of readiness. It is not optional. It is not something you do when you feel like it. It is the first rep of every day.

Step 1. Breathe. Settle-Down breathing. Two to three minutes. Release whatever you brought with you. School. Traffic. An argument. A bad grade. Let it go. Get present.

Step 2. Check In. GED Foundation. Am I grateful to be here? Am I excited about what we are doing today? Am I devoted to the process regardless of outcome?

Step 3. Lock In. Set your intention. What is the target for this session? Not a vague 'I want to get better.' A specific focus. One thing. Own it.

Step 4. Go. Aggressive focus. Full commitment from the first rep. Not warming up mentally. Not easing in. Present and competing from the start.

Athletes who master the Training Start do not have bad practices. They may have challenging ones. They may have ones where the body does not cooperate. But they do not have throwaway days because they never show up without intention.

Breathing

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Breathing is the single most important performance tool you have. It is always available. It costs nothing. It works in every situation. And almost nobody trains it deliberately.

I teach five forms of breathing. Each one serves a different purpose. Each one is a skill that must be practiced, not just understood.

Settle-Down Breathing. This is your foundation. Extended exhale. Four count in, six to eight count out. This is how you get present. How you release tension. How you transition from chaos to calm. Use it before every practice, every performance, every high-pressure moment. This is your reset button.

Battle Breathing. Deep, powerful breaths that build capacity under pressure. This is where you train your nervous system to stay engaged when things get hard. Wim Hof progressive breath-hold protocol. Three sets of deep breaths with increasing hold times. This builds mental strength and physical capacity. Your intensity becomes your advantage.

Performance Breathing. Rhythmic breathing at about 80 percent. This is your in-game breathing. Steady. Controlled. It keeps you in the zone between over-revving and under-performing. Strong, balanced, smooth, focused.

Open-Heart Breathing. This is recovery and connection. Breathing into the heart center. It is how you come down after competition. How you process what happened. How you reconnect with gratitude and love for the work. This is where Accept Love lives in the body.

Breath Holds. Training yourself to stay calm and present when your body is telling you to panic. This is the ultimate mental toughness drill. When you can hold your breath and stay composed, you can handle anything competition throws at you.

Think about a waterman like Naish, charging massive waves at Ho'okipa. The ocean does not care about your schedule or your stress level. If your breathing is not trained, your body panics. If your breathing is trained, you stay present, you read the water, you commit. Every elite ocean athlete understands this. The breath is the bridge between fear and focus.

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If you are not training your breathing, you are leaving performance on the table. Period.

The Competition Is Intense

If your schedule is packed — practices, training, lessons, rehearsals, games, performances — that is not a problem. That is an opportunity. The demands you are meeting every week are building something that goes beyond any single activity. You are building the Hammah Mentality.

It Is All One Thing

Whether you are balancing multiple sports, combining athletics with music or academics, or managing a demanding schedule alongside the rest of your life. It is all one thing. It is not five different commitments pulling you in different directions. It is one person training focus, discipline, and performance expression across multiple stages.

Naish understood this better than anyone. Windsurfing. Kiteboarding. Stand-up paddleboarding. Foiling. Wing foiling. He did not see five separate sports. He saw one pursuit expressed in different ways. When asked about constantly reinventing himself, he said it simply: "Whenever a new sport comes in, I tend to really get into it. I'll grow it, push it, have fun reinventing myself. But the things I have passion for always cycle back." That is seeing the transfer. That is the Hammah Mentality.

The variety is a strength. Moving between different kinds of training keeps your nervous system adaptable and your mental game sharp. The focus required to nail a difficult passage in music is the same focus required to execute under pressure in competition. The discipline of showing up for strength and conditioning translates directly to the discipline of staying in a process when things get hard. On the field. On the court. In the water. On stage.

See the Transfer

The athletes and performers who separate themselves are the ones who see connections where others see compartments. Every activity you commit to is a rep for your mental game. The question is not "How do I juggle all this?" The question is "How is each of these making me better at everything else?"

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Name the Grind

When you show up to a packed schedule week after week, you are already demonstrating the Devotion piece of the GED Foundation. But here is what matters. Do not let the grind become invisible to you. Name it. Own it. The commitment you are making is itself a form of excellence. Not just a path to it.

Travel and Disruption

Travel. Schedule changes. Tournaments. Family trips. Away games. Camps. Disruption is part of every competitor's life. The mistake is treating time away from your normal routine as lost time.

Travel is part of the competition, not an interruption to it.

Adapting. Staying sharp without your normal structure. That is the mental game. Anyone can perform when everything is comfortable. The Hammah Mentality shows up when the structure changes and you stay locked in anyway.

Naish spent his entire career traveling the world. Competing in over 20 countries a year. Holland. Germany. Japan. France. The Bahamas. The conditions were never the same. The wind, the waves, the equipment, the competition. Everything changed. But his process did not. He showed up, he read the conditions, he committed. That is what a portable mental game looks like over a lifetime.

Build a Portable Routine

Mental training habits travel well. Breathing protocols, pre-performance routines, and the GED check-in do not need a gym or a rehearsal space. Build a short routine you own. Something you can do anywhere that keeps you connected to your process.

3-Minute Breathing Protocol. Settle-Down breathing before each activity. Three minutes. Wherever you are. This is your reset button.

GED Foundation Check-In. Before every session.

Gratitude = Awareness and Acceptance.

Excitement = Controlled Passion.

Devotion = Discipline and Trust the Process.

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Make it yours. Not something imposed. This routine belongs to you. It goes where you go.

Coming Back

When you return from time away there is no "catching up" mindset. You did not fall behind. You were training in a different environment. Pick up where the process is. That is the Accept Love piece. No judgment about the gap. No guilt. No panic. Just re-engage.

After nearly 30 years running the Naish brand, Robby sold the company in 2023. He said he had started stressing over things that never used to bother him. So he let it go. No guilt. No looking back. He got back on the water at Ho'okipa and reconnected with what matters. That is Accept Love in action. That is what coming back looks like when you trust the process.

Dealing with a Lot

When the demands stack up — school, training, performances, travel, relationships, expectations — the instinct is to think in terms of survival. "How do I get through this?"

Survival is the wrong frame. The right frame is growth.

Pressure does not just test you. It reveals you. It reveals your tendencies. The patterns you default to when things get hard. Some people speed up. Some shut down. Some get loud. Some disappear. None of these are good or bad by themselves. But you have to know which one you are. Awareness is the first step to managing it.

The GED Foundation Under Load

When you are dealing with a lot, the GED Foundation is not just a warm-up tool. It becomes your operating system.

Gratitude becomes your grounding mechanism. Awareness of what is real right now. Not what happened yesterday. Not what is coming tomorrow. This is where you stop the spiral before it starts.

Excitement becomes your energy management system. When everything feels urgent, controlled passion keeps you from redlining. You do not need more energy. You need better-directed energy.

Devotion becomes your anchor. When the schedule is relentless, discipline and trusting the process keeps you from chasing results and losing yourself in the noise. Stay in the process. The outcomes follow.

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You Are Not Juggling. You Are Building.

The language matters. "Juggling" implies you are one dropped ball away from disaster. That is a survival frame. Every demand on your time and energy is an opportunity to practice the mental skills that make you elite. Focus. Breathing. Presence. Transition. Recovery. These are the real skills. Every packed day is a training ground for them.

You are not managing chaos. You are building capacity. The ability to hold more, do more, and stay present through all of it. That is what separates people who peak from people who sustain.

Naish sustained for over 50 years. He is not just a story about talent. He is a story about capacity. About a man who kept showing up, kept learning, kept reinventing, and kept loving the work. When asked about his philosophy, he put it this way: study, stay humble, save your money, and practice for passion rather than glory. That is dealing with a lot. That is the long game.

The Role of the Coach

None of this works in a vacuum. Behind every athlete who learns to breathe, focus, and stay in the process, there is a coach who cares enough to teach it.

Accept Love is the foundation of great coaching. It is caring about your athletes as people first, not just performers. It is accepting the responsibility that comes with their trust. When athletes feel safe, they are willing to be vulnerable, to struggle, to grow. Great coaching flows through relationship, not around it.

Coach Bobby Dodd taught me this at Georgia Tech. He competed fiercely while treating people with dignity and respect. He knew that relationships were not obstacles to winning. They were the pathway to it. The best coaches I have known since then all understand the same thing.

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Even Naish, who built his career as an individual competitor, credits his family and the community around him for everything. His father Rick shaped boards for him and built the foundation. His mother Carol built the business. When he broke his pelvis in 2015, his first serious injury after decades of charging, it was his family that got him back on the water. Nobody does this alone. The coach, the family, the community. They are the structure that makes sustained performance possible.

What the Coach Does

Whether you are a head coach setting the tone, an assistant reinforcing the message, a teacher breaking down skills, or a motivator igniting the fire, the foundation is the same. You have to care. The role changes. The love does not.

The coach notices. You see the athlete struggling with confidence. You take time to understand what is going on. You provide acceptance and encouragement until they rediscover their strengths.

The coach teaches the breathing. You do not just tell athletes to calm down. You give them the tools. Settle-Down breathing before practice. Battle breathing to build capacity. Performance breathing during competition. You train it. You model it.

The coach holds the standard. You hold yourself to the same discipline you require from your athletes. Accountability is not punishment. It is culture. When expectations are clear and consequences consistent, accountability becomes trust.

The coach protects the process. You keep the focus on growth, not just results. You debrief without judgment. You help athletes see that a bad performance is data, not identity. You keep them in the process when everything around them is pulling them toward the scoreboard.

Coaching Is the Hardest Work

Accept Love is not soft. It is the hardest thing in coaching because it requires you to be fully present and fully invested. Every time. You cannot ask someone to be vulnerable, to fail, to struggle, to push past limits, if they do not feel safe. Safety comes from knowing you care about them beyond the scoreboard.

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The coaches who last, who transform lives, who get remembered. They all understand this. Technique matters. Strategy matters. But none of it sticks without the relationship underneath.

When they asked Robby Naish what he wanted to be remembered for after all the titles, all the records, all the years, he said one thing: "How much I loved and enjoyed it." That is the whole game right there.

Accept Love.

No judgment. No guilt. No catching up. Just presence, process, and the Hammah Mentality. Across every stage you step onto.

"I have known Brad Yates since he was my homeroom teacher back in high school, and we have been friends ever since. His approach to life, teaching, coaching and 'High Level' has always been straight forward, methodical and easy to understand. His work is a great reminder that as we try to age gracefully, self awareness, self discipline, and being grateful for who we are and what we have are paramount to happiness and success."

— Robby Naish

Be Grateful
Be Excited
Be Devoted

Show up ready.
Accept love.

And let it flow.

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