

Operation Vet NOW (OVN)

Annual Summary of OVN Ambassador Athlete Project for 2024 Draft



Executive Summary

Subject: Annual Summary of OVN Ambassador Athlete Project for 2024

Data Source: OVN Veteran Athlete Direct Feedback

Date Span: 1 Jan - 31 Dec 2024

Program Synopsis: OVN Ambassador Athlete Project

The OVN Ambassador Athlete Project is a national outreach and engagement initiative that leverages the power of sport to support Veterans struggling with mental health challenges. Operated by Operation Vet NOW (OVN), the program selects Veterans to serve as Ambassador Athletes—competitors who represent OVN at amateur and professional events while actively promoting mental wellness, peer connection, and suicide prevention. Nearly 70 Ambassadors, many with combat experience and diagnoses such as PTSD, TBI, depression, and anxiety, use their platform to share personal stories, reduce stigma, and inspire other Veterans to seek help. Through competition, visibility, and mission-driven outreach, the program empowers these athletes to heal while helping others do the same, embodying OVN’s mission of meeting Needs through Opportunities that enhance Awareness and Wellness.

OVN Ambassador Athletes - 2024 Program Engagement, Personal Impact & Memorable Moments

OVN Ambassador Athletes provided heartfelt and insightful feedback on their experiences throughout 2024. Their responses centered around three key areas:

1. Engagement Opportunities Through the OVN Program

Ambassadors identified several powerful tools that facilitated connection with other veterans:

- Social media emerged as the top method for initiating engagement, spreading awareness, and showcasing veteran stories.
- OVN Apparel and Branding (t-shirts, jerseys, hoodies, decals, etc.) served as frequent conversation starters at events and in daily life.
- Banners, Canopies, and Event Visibility helped draw attention and foster curiosity from other veterans and supporters.
- In-Person Interactions at races, tributes, and community events provided meaningful opportunities to build relationships.
- Ambassador Tool Kits supported outreach and left a lasting impression.

Ambassadors often reported how simply wearing OVN gear or setting up banners initiated spontaneous and meaningful conversations with fellow veterans. These moments provided key opportunities to explain the OVN mission and offer support directly aligned with OVN's purpose of meeting Needs through Opportunities to improve mental awareness and Wellness.

Importantly, ambassadors were not only equipped with tools-they used them to engage at scale. In total, 49 athletes estimated their 2024 outreach impact, with over 40% reporting contact with 51 or more veterans. A combined 63% reached between 25 to 500 veterans, showing how the Ambassador Program serves as a critical frontline engagement channel for peer-to-peer outreach.

2. Personal Impact of Being an OVN Ambassador in 2024

The Ambassador Athlete experience had a deeply personal impact on many members:

- It provided a sense of purpose, helping athletes stay committed to their sport and connect their passion with service.
- Many shared how being part of the team supported their mental health and emotional resilience, especially during times of struggle or transition.
- Ambassadors valued the camaraderie and shared mission, expressing pride in belonging to a network of like-minded veterans.
- Several noted how the program gave them a platform to advocate for fellow veterans, share their own journeys, and promote mental health awareness.
- The program instilled motivation and accountability, driving ambassadors to stay active, connect with others, and represent something bigger than themselves.

3. Memorable and Impactful Moments

Athletes shared powerful stories that highlight the real-world impact of the OVN program:

- Emotional conversations with fellow veterans, Gold Star families, and strangers drawn to the OVN mission left lasting impressions.
- Several ambassadors spoke about honoring fallen heroes at events or races, often receiving heartfelt responses from audiences, including standing ovations and requests for tributes.
- Others described connecting with veterans in need, offering resources, emotional support, and a sense of community that may have otherwise been missing.
- Some ambassadors were able to share OVN's message in public venues-from jiu-jitsu gyms and motocross events to veteran retreats and formal military training sessions.
- Team moments, such as spending time together at events or retreats, strengthened bonds and reminded athletes they're part of a nationwide brotherhood.
- Notably, one ambassador mentioned being inspired to launch a digital space for veterans, while others led retreats, gave motivational talks, or represented OVN in media and interviews.

Conclusion

The OVN Ambassador Athlete Program continues to make a profound and multifaceted impact on the veteran community. By combining competitive presence with compassionate outreach, ambassadors embody the OVN mission in action. Their efforts demonstrate how veterans supporting veterans-through Needs, Opportunities, Awareness, and Wellness-can lead to healing, resilience, and renewed purpose.

Crucially, the program underscores the powerful influence of belonging to a team. For many ambassadors,

the motivation drawn from being part of an organization that truly supports and cares about them is life-changing. They are not alone in their journey-being surrounded by fellow veterans who understand their experiences fosters an unspoken bond that inspires growth and perseverance. This sense of unity reinforces self-worth and drives each athlete to push forward, not just for themselves, but for one another.

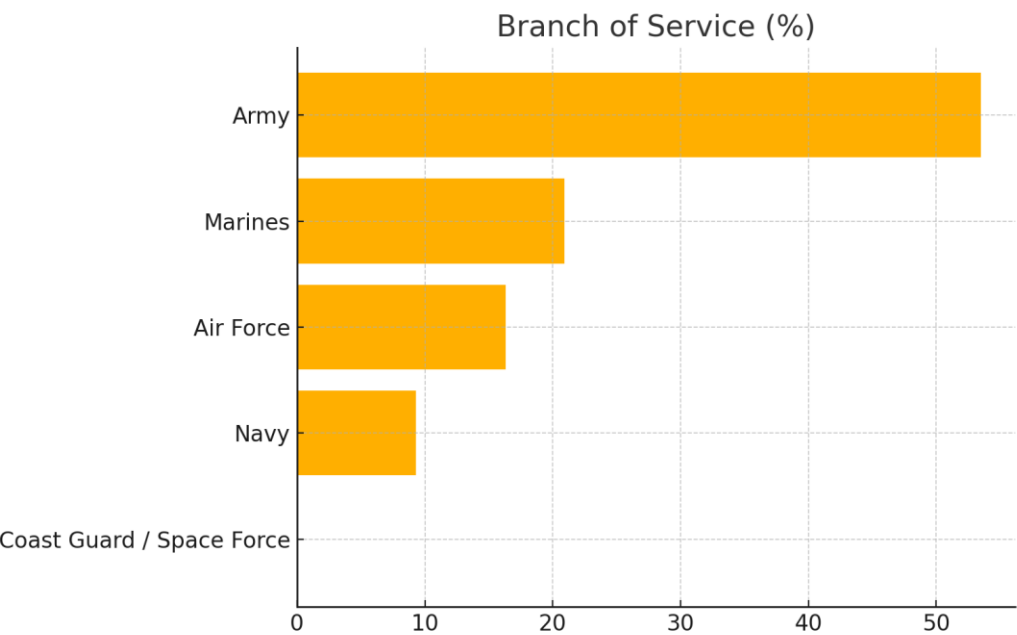
In addition, the program highlights the therapeutic power of sport as more than just physical activity. Training and competition serve as critical outlets for managing stress, rebuilding confidence, and supporting mental wellness. But it's the peer-to-peer connection-those real conversations, shared struggles, and mutual encouragement-that amplify the healing. Whether through a race, a moment of solidarity, or simply showing up, these ambassadors are proving that sport, purpose, and genuine connection can transform lives and strengthen the broader veteran community.

Veterans Served Demographics – 2024 OVN Ambassador Athlete Program Summary

Military Background

- Years of Service:
 - Service duration; 11.6% each serving 5 or 8 years, and over 25% serving 10 years or more.
- Deployment:
 - 74.4% reported deploying outside the U.S.

Branch of Service

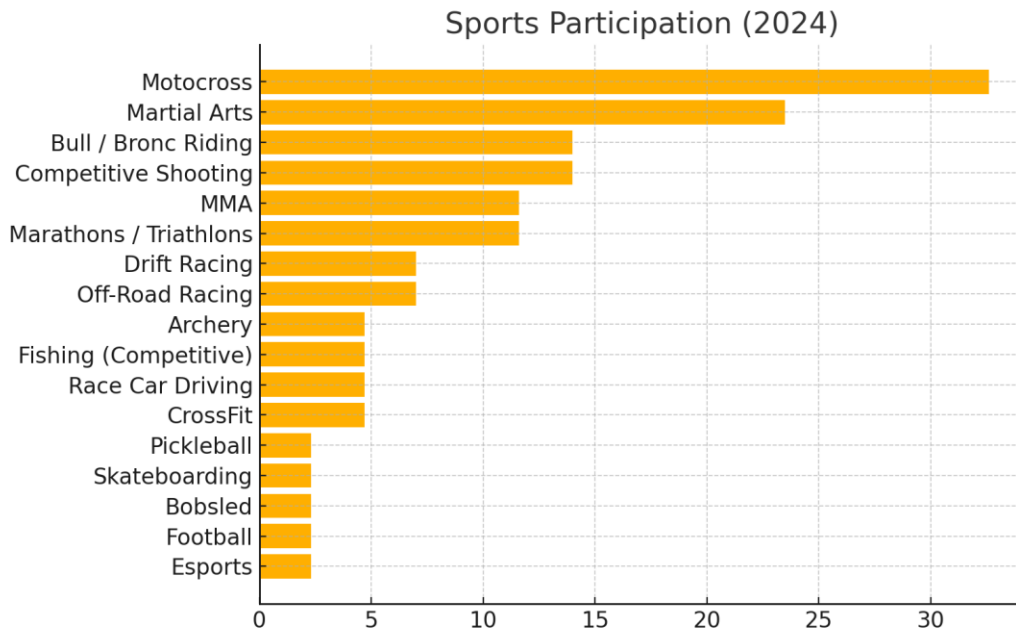


Sports Participation (2024)

- Years Competing in Sport:
 - Most reported between 2-7 years, with some having over 20 years of competition experience.
- Training Commitment:
 - 32.6% train 5 days a week, with an average competition frequency of 10+ events annually.
 - 39.5% train in gyms, while others use home gyms, martial arts academies, or outdoor spaces.

Peer Support & Veteran Connection

- Training with Other Veterans: 74.4% train with fellow Veterans.
- Motivation from Veteran Camaraderie:
 - 86% said meeting other Veterans competing in sports significantly boosted their motivation.
 - 92% felt it was important to know other Veterans were also competing.



Mental Health & Sport Impact

- Mental Wellness Prior to Sports:
 - Average self-rating was 2.7 / 5, with 56% rating it poor or very poor.
- Mental Health Impact of Sports:
 - 91.9% rated sports as "important" or "vital" to their mental wellness.
 - On a 1-10 scale, the average improvement rating from sport participation was 9.2.
- Addiction Recovery:
 - Among those who reported battling addiction, nearly 80% credited sport as a significant or vital part of their recovery journey.

