

KEEPING YOUR ATHLETE IN THE GAME

MVP PARENT

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Mission

MVP PARENT is committed to providing a credible resource that educates and supports the parents of youth athletes. **MVP PARENT** gives parents the information they need to keep youth athletes performing at the highest level physically, mentally, and emotionally. **MVP PARENT** takes a holistic and evidence-based approach to injury prevention, skill development, nutrition, and sports psychology.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY RICHARD B. DUBIN



PARENTING THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES

One of the hardest things we have to do as parents is let our kids go through hard times. We want to rush to their aid and intervene where we think it's helpful. Unfortunately, we are doing more harm than good. The only way for anyone (including our kids) to truly learn to master anything is to experience it for themselves. So what do we do when our kids are struggling, not getting enough playing time, or just plain sad and disappointed with the way the season is going? Maybe they are having a tough time dealing with a coach. Maybe one of their teammates is a ball hog. Maybe they are having a tough time balancing sports and academics.

What can we as parents do?

How about simply supporting, encouraging them, and loving them through the process. Explain that this is all a lesson and let them go through it and experience what it feels like to come out the other side. This looks different for every family. But one thing I can tell you is that living vicariously through your child and taking on their feelings as your own is not the way to go about it. Calling the coach is not the way either. Coddling them doesn't help. Honesty is the best policy. Get all the information you can by asking a lot of questions and not feeding into the drama of it all. Stay neutral and be understanding. Our job as parents is to tone down whatever drama there may be by giving our children room to think through for themselves.

They are individuals and have to experience challenges and difficulties of things not going their way so they can learn how to deal with the real world when sports are over. Think back to when you were a kid and what worked for you. I lost my dad at age 9 and had zero involvement from my mom and had to learn on the go. I am not saying that this is right either. All I am saying is that from this experience I learned so much about speaking up, conflict resolution, independence, perseverance, and hard work. All these skills have enabled me to raise 4 beautiful children, start multiple successful businesses, and maintain friendships for over 45 years. I think the most important lessons have more to do with how to practice patience, tolerance, forgiveness and selflessness with myself and others. I have learned to be grateful for the good and the bad and that's truly helped me out more than you know.

You must check out the Waterman cover story and see how through tough times, we learn and grow. The Waterman family are some incredible people, and I am blessed to have them in my life. The NATA contribution on overuse injuries contains some key information on the development of your son or daughter. Joel Franco is producing a documentary on putting the focus back on the kids and I felt it was key to where we are with *MVP Parent*—the film is in final production and we'll keep you posted when it's out. I am so pleased to be collaborating with the National Alliance for Youth Sports and Greg Bach really captures what it takes to compete with confidence. And a beautiful follow-up to that piece is about choosing confidence by Linda Sterling. John O'Sullivan opens our eyes as parents to be okay with FOMO.

This is another incredible installment of *MVP Parent* and I hope you all enjoy it as much as I do. ■

LIMITING YOUTH SPORT SPECIALIZATION

How to Keep Your Athletes Safe from Overuse Injuries

A WORD FROM THE NATA

Many youth athletes are diligently dedicated to playing the sports they love. At first glance, this seems like a good thing, but many youth athletes and sport families are unknowingly jeopardizing the child's health and safety by specializing in one sport too early and year-round.

“When athletes specialize too early, or engage in excessive play, they are increasing the probability of injury and reducing the chances of achieving their goals,” said NATA President, Kathy Dieringer, EdD, LAT, ATC. “We want to help athletes and parents recognize health is a competitive advantage.” In fact, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) has dedicated the third full week of October as National Youth Sport Specialization Awareness Week to help reduce the risk of injury related to sport specialization and keep athletes safe and healthy. In 2023, that will be October 16-21.

What You Can Do as a Parent

Visit atyourownrisk.org to find useful information, such as our Youth Sport Specialization Safety Recommendations infographic to download and share with your child athlete as well as with other parents. The infographic includes the following recommendations, all aimed at addressing the health and well-being of adolescent and young athletes:

1 Delay specializing in a single sport for as long as possible

Sport specialization is often described as participating and/or training for a single sport year-round. Adolescent and young athletes should strive to participate, or sample, a variety of sports. This recommendation supports general physical fitness, athleticism and reduces injury risk in athletes.

2 One team at a time

Adolescent and young athletes should participate in one organized sport per season. Many adolescent and young athletes participate or train year-round in a single sport, while simultaneously competing in other organized sports. Total volume of organized sport participation per season is an important risk factor for injury.

3 Less than eight months per year

Adolescent and young athletes should not play a single sport more than eight months per year.

4 No more hours/week than age in years

Adolescent and young athletes should not participate in organized sport and/or activity more hours per week than their age (i.e., a 12-year-old athlete should not participate in more than 12 hours per week of organized sport).

5 Two days of rest per week

Adolescent and young athletes should have a minimum of two days off per week from organized training and competition. Athletes should not participate in other organized team sports, competitions and/or training on rest and recovery days.

6 Rest and recovery time from organized sport participation

Adolescent and young athletes should spend time away from organized sport and/or activity at the end of each competitive season. This allows for both physical and mental recovery, promotes health and well-being and minimizes injury risk and burnout/dropout.

These health-focused recommendations to reduce the risk of injury due to youth sport specialization were previously endorsed by the Professional Football Athletic Trainers' Society, Professional Hockey Athletic Training Society, Professional Soccer Athletic Trainers' Society, National Basketball Athletic Trainers' Association, Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers' Society and the NATA Intercollegiate Council for Sports Medicine.



DOWNLOAD AND SHARE THIS GRAPHIC WITH YOUR CHILD ATHLETE AS WELL AS WITH OTHER PARENTS

atyourownrisk.org/articles/youth-sport-specialization

ABOUT AT YOUR OWN RISK

The mission of At Your Own Risk is to educate, provide resources and equip the public to act and advocate for safety in work, life and sport. At Your Own Risk is a way of showing employers, workers, legislators, school administrators, parents, and student athletes the value of athletic trainers within the health care team. By employing an athletic trainer, you provide a safer approach to work, life, and sport.

MORE THAN A FILM PROJECT

**BRINGING THE FOCUS
BACK ON THE CHILDREN**



BY JOEL FRANCO

Where Our Children Play: The Challenge of Youth Sports is a documentary film in development about the need to change the culture of youth sports by bringing the focus back to the kids.

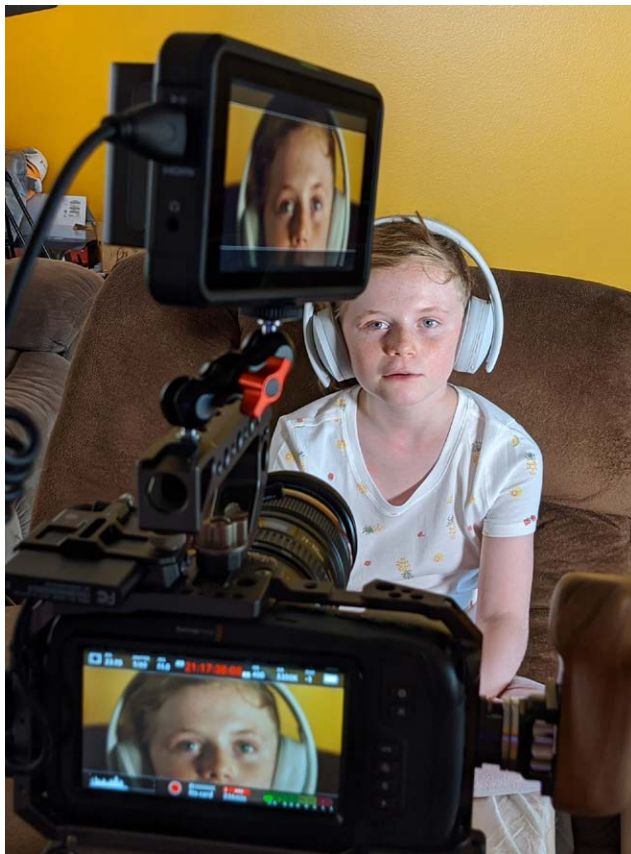
Kids are overwhelmed by the pressure of pleasing their parents or performing for their coaches. Too often they stop playing for themselves.

Our mission with this film is to expand the conversation and spotlight progress and potential solutions. One player/family at the time. One team. One club. From the bottom up. We want to affect change through honest dialogue and having a better understanding about how everyone works together.

Children who are pushed to the limits and under incredible pressure to perform end up injuring themselves at alarming rates and typically drop out of sports by age 13, the age when over 70% of kids leave all competitions, according to a poll from the National Alliance for Youth Sports.

We used to have coaches who were educators and mentors. Now we have facilitators. We have coaches who simply want to put together a group of 'best' kids and win games.

The film is looking to explore the negative impact of the hyper-competitive youth sports culture that has taken over. This current system has put winning ahead of good sportsmanship. It has forgotten who we are doing this for and the very real and traumatic toll it's taking on children, their families, and communities. By helping to begin the



Children who are pushed to the limits and under incredible pressure to perform end up injuring themselves at alarming rates and **typically drop out of sports by age 13, the age when over 70% of kids leave all competitions.**

dialogue and in working together as a community – coaches, parents and kids – we can create an environment where our athletes can thrive.

Many kids we spoke with have told us they loved the quiet of the weeks with no practice and no games during the Covid-19 lockdown and pandemic. They loved not having to get up early on a Saturday for a game that is 45 minutes away and having to endure the ride to and from the game (or practice) with mom and dad.

All too often, kids are disregarded completely if they are not tall enough, fast enough, or strong enough. How many kids are we leaving behind because we forget we are supposed to help all children at every level with both physical and mental fitness, not simply promote a certain few.

Youth sports can have a profound social impact on children. Children growing in a healthy environment, developing life skills, forming long term friendships, spending quality time with their parents. Coaches need to revert to being mentors, educators, 'father/mother' figures.

These are societal changes that can only take place with meaningful discussion about what is happening within their communities.

It all starts with knowing who we are doing sports for:

ALL OUR KIDS. ■

JOEL FRANCO is a producer/director and founder of Chesapeake Films, based in Las Vegas, NV. He has been making films, both documentaries and features, for more than 20 years. To learn more about this film and others in development, visit chesfilms.wordpress.com

Help your young athlete –
regardless of their sport –
flourish on their journeys to
self-confidence.



NWSL STARS ON **CRAFTING AND COMPETING WITH CONFIDENCE**

BY GREG BACH

"It's ok to say
you're having a
tough day physically
or mentally."

Tyler Lussi.

Photo courtesy of Angel City FC

Two of the biggest kicks in NCAA women's soccer history have been delivered by the lethal left foot of Kelsey Turnbow.

And she banked on the self-confidence that she began crafting during her youth athletic journey to help make them happen.

In the 2020 national championship game, it was Santa Clara's Turnbow who struck with a dazzling goal in the waning minutes to even the score at 1-1 against Florida State; and then amid the swirling pressure of penalty kicks to decide the title, she stepped up and delivered again to help her team grab the title.

"Just knowing that I could trust in myself was really key for being able to capitalize in those moments," says Turnbow, who stars for San Diego Fútbol Club (FC) in the National Women's Soccer League. "It was very high pressure, but the moment felt so still because I was able to believe in myself and follow through for my team."

She, and other top National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) stars we spoke with, stress how vital it is to help kids begin constructing that confidence in themselves early; and to look inward for building it rather than relying on the praise of others.

"It has really helped me to find confidence within myself and not look for validation of coaches or players to make me feel confident," Turnbow says. "That has been really important because there are going to be coaches that don't like you or players who don't enjoy playing with you. But if you can just really appreciate yourself and love yourself and believe in yourself and know that you are capable and know that you are in that environment for a reason, that's what has really helped me along my confidence journey."

Use the tips on the following page to help your young athlete – regardless of their sport – flourish on their journey to self-confidence:



**NATIONAL WOMEN'S
SOCCER LEAGUE
(NWSL) STARS STRESS
HOW VITAL IT IS TO
HELP KIDS BEGIN
CONSTRUCTING
THAT CONFIDENCE IN
THEMSELVES EARLY;
AND TO LOOK INWARD
FOR BUILDING IT
RATHER THAN RELYING
ON THE PRAISE OF
OTHERS.**



① Squash Fluctuations



“What I’ve learned through a lot of mental work, and what I try to tell younger kids, is if you rely on your confidence to come from every time a coach tells you ‘good job’ or when you score a goal, then it’s going to fluctuate a lot and you’re going to feel a rollercoaster of emotions all the time,” says Chelsea Washington, the marvelous midfielder for the Orlando Pride. “Confidence has to come from yourself – it can’t depend on anybody else. The more you depend and wait on it from somebody else, it’s just going to be if that person is up for giving you a compliment that day, and that person might not even know that your confidence is relying on them.”

② It’s OK to be Off



Not every practice and game is going to be draped in spectacular playmaking – and shouldn’t be expected by young athletes either. Helping them understand that encountering rocky patches along the way is part of competing will enable them to be more forgiving of their performances that don’t go as planned. “It’s ok to say you’re having a tough day physically or mentally because it’s not going to be perfect or great every single day,” says Tyler Lussi, a forward for Angel City in the NWSL who just so happens to be the all-time scoring leader at Princeton – for both the men’s and women’s programs.

③ Flip Stress into Bravery



When Turnbow was taking that penalty kick with the NCAA title up for grabs, she didn’t worry about missing or allow her thoughts to wander into negative territory. And her mental trick is a terrific one for all young athletes to tuck away and turn to in those crucial moments when they desperately want to deliver for their team.

“I think in a penalty kick shootout it’s really important to realize that you are being brave in that moment,” Turnbow shares. “Not everyone is put in such a special moment like that so you’re stepping up for your team and you’re saying, ‘I’m going to take a chance for us.’ And it’s really brave to do that. You win as a team and you lose as a team, but knowing you are being brave for the team helps you be really calm in that pressure moment.” ■

GREG BACH is the Senior Director of Communications and Content for the National Alliance for Youth Sports and the author of 10 books, including *Secrets of Successful Coaching: Winning Tips & Advice from 50 of America’s Most Successful Coaches*.

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"Confidence
has to come from
yourself."

Chelsee Washington



MVP EXCLUSIVE

When the D-1 Offer Turns Sour

**One family's journey to finding
a path where their athletes are
celebrated, not tolerated.**

BY BRIAN WEBB



Here at MVP Parent, we encounter examples every day of how crucial family support is to the success of student athletes. Helping them achieve personal goals within their sports of choice is, of course, a priority, but also providing the essential building blocks of personal growth, balance, and values that will serve them well later in life, whether that life includes the continuing pursuit of athletic achievement or not.

The Waterman family, formerly of Colonie, New York, is an excellent example of just such a family. We recently had the pleasure of speaking with parents Rahim and Camesha Waterman about their parenting journey while raising their sons, Bryce and Jaden. Both young men began participating in team athletics as youngsters – in community programs, on public and private school teams, then on to Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams, and now thriving at the college level.

While speaking with Rahim and Camesha about their parenting approach, a few things became clear right away. First, they have allowed Bryce and Jaden to pursue athletics while also encouraging a well-rounded approach to life including academic discipline, faith, and a sense of community. Secondly, they have been consistently engaged as emotional support for their sons – always ready to cheer their successes, but also to be present

for them during the challenging milestones that inevitably accompany the pursuit of sports excellence. And thirdly, they have been careful not to burden Bryce and Jaden with unbalanced expectations or the kind of vicarious pressure all too typical of many overly zealous sports parents.

Each of these young men has pursued an interesting path to the places they find themselves thriving today. Bryce is in his senior year at the College of Staten Island (CUNY) and is a starter on their basketball team. Younger brother Jaden is in his second year at Harford College in Maryland, where he is competing for an infield starter position on their baseball team. Their individual journeys have not always followed straight lines or been without their hardships and challenges. But through it all, they have had the consistent support and encouragement of their parents and the friendship and brotherly love of each other to lean on.

A memorable quote from Camesha in our initial call with the parents, and one that was echoed again in our separate interviews with Bryce and Jaden, perfectly captures the spirit of this family's support for their student athletes. She said,

“We want our children to be in a place where they are celebrated, not tolerated.”



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Photos courtesy of the Watermans



BRYCE'S STORY

From an early age, Bryce Waterman showed both a keen interest and a promising skill set for the sport of basketball. Bryce has enjoyed plenty of success, played on some outstanding teams, and earned acclaim as an exceptional athlete all along the way. All of those successes are, of course, impressive and uplifting. But for purposes of this article, we will focus instead on some of the more difficult waypoints he has experienced as a student athlete, and the ways in which his own perseverance and the support of his family helped him find his way through the challenges he faced.

EARLY PROMISE

When Rahim and Camesha saw 8-year-old Bryce's skills and love for basketball at a local athletic center, they made arrangements during the summer between his 4th and 5th grade year to receive private coaching from Luscious Jordan (former Assistant Coach at the University of Massachusetts, University of Albany Alum and former Albany Patroon). Bryce said that early reinforcement from his parents was crucial to his continued success and continuing love for the game. During his elementary school years, Bryce participated in the Capital Basketball Youth League (CBYL) program, then made his first foray into interscholastic as an 8th grader, when he won a starting spot on Colonie High School's Freshman basketball team.

CHANGE OF VENUE

In his junior year at Colonie High School, Bryce's sharp 3-point shooting contributed to his varsity team's run at the Section II AA championship with a finish in second place. A former CBYL coach who saw the game and was aware of Bryce's D-1 aspirations later approached the Watermans with the suggestion of a transfer to the Virginia Episcopal School (VES), where he had landed a spot on the basketball coaching staff. This coach suggested that such a move might be Bryce's best option for elevating his visibility for consideration by D-1 schools. Despite the fact that VES was 600 miles from home, the family made the difficult decision to accept the coach's invitation, and Bryce was on his way to Lynchburg, Virginia, in the fall. Bryce said the separation was difficult for all of them, especially his mother, but the family was willing to make that sacrifice to help give Bryce what they believed would be his best chance of achieving his D-1 goal.

WHAT NOW?

At VES, Bryce was a starter on the basketball team and attracted a fair amount of D-1 attention. East Carolina and New Jersey Institute of Technology recruited him, but complications with each of those opportunities ultimately resulted in neither school being able to extend an offer. As graduation from VES grew nearer, Bryce still did not have a college destination. He remembers all his classmates lining up for "Senior Day" pictures with sweatshirts, tee shirts, and pennants of their declared college destinations. But without a decision in place, he posed for his picture simply wearing a "USA" tee shirt and holding a basketball, then returned home after graduating that summer without a destination for the fall. He participated in several D-1 workouts that summer, but two more offers that appeared promising fell apart before they came to fruition. This was a very difficult time for Bryce, but his parents continued to support him with research, working connections, and communicating with potential prospect schools. Finally, they were able to arrange a mid-summer visit to Pensacola State University (D-1 junior college), which culminated in an offer. Despite all of the stress and discouragement along the way, Bryce accepted, and had a destination for that fall.

FINALLY, D-1!

(Be careful what you wish for)

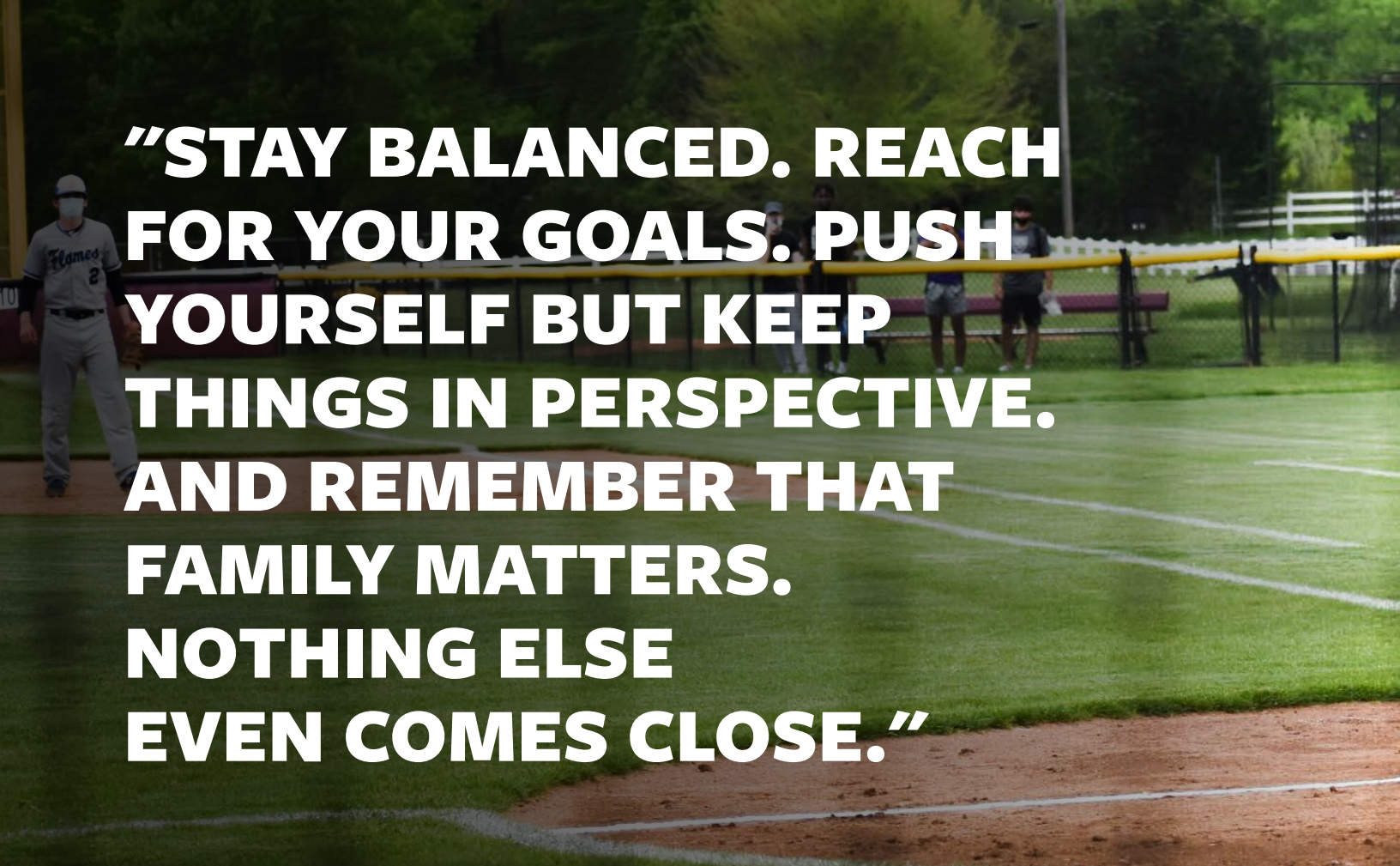
Bryce excelled on the Pensacola State University team, and by the end of his first year, he was getting some serious looks from D-1 schools again. One of them was Purdue University in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he interviewed remotely and quickly received a scholarship offer. They required that he answer within 24 hours, which he remembers feeling as somewhat high-pressured. Despite 3 other D-1 offers in hand, Bryce did not want to pass up what he felt was a better fit for his style of play, so he quickly said “Yes” and reported that fall as a transfer to Purdue. This was 2020, the first year of COVID. That, combined with the fact that Purdue had apparently over-recruited resulted in several new acquisitions being given no playing time or coaching attention. Bryce felt unseen at Purdue and decided that it was not the right place for him. After discussing options with his parents, he decided to withdraw and return home.

THE RIGHT FIT

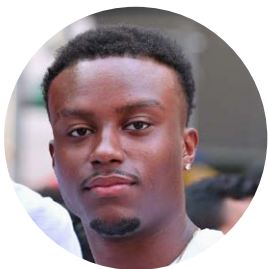
On Bryce’s return from Fort Wayne, the Watermans welcomed him home, comforted him, and then went right to work helping him plan his next move. Despite his discouragement, he scheduled some workouts with Chuckie Dukes at his Albany training facility. Bryce said that those sessions helped restore his positive morale and reminded him of his love for staying in shape. Ultimately, Bryce looked at the College of Staten Island (CUNY), where a former coach from his AAU days was Head Coach. A campus visit was scheduled where Bryce reconnected with his old coach and met the entire basketball staff. Bryce and his parents felt good about the visit. It was a reasonable distance from his parent’s home near Albany. Ultimately, Bryce committed to Staten Island, and has earned a spot in their starting lineup, where he has set a school record for 3-point scoring in a season and says he is, “Playing the best basketball of my life.”

Bryce is majoring in Business Management, with an eye toward a master’s program specializing in Sports Management. He will continue to play basketball but says that he is enjoying renewed success and satisfaction in the academic, social, and artistic elements of his life. At the end of the day, Bryce Waterman credits his faith and the love and support of his parents and brother for keeping him on the path to a place where he is “celebrated, not tolerated.”





“STAY BALANCED. REACH FOR YOUR GOALS. PUSH YOURSELF BUT KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE. AND REMEMBER THAT FAMILY MATTERS. NOTHING ELSE EVEN COMES CLOSE.”



JADEN'S BASE PATH

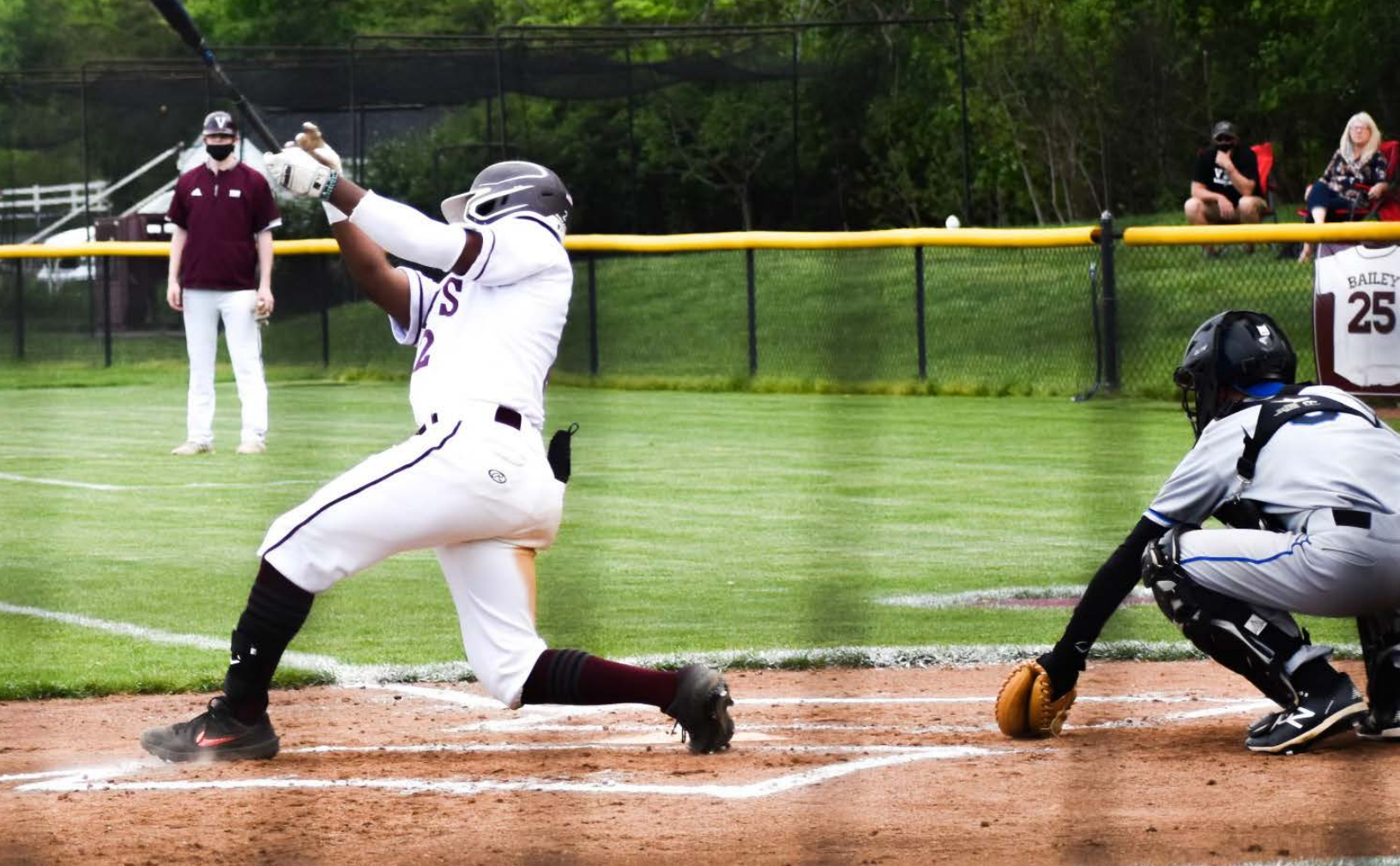
Bryce's younger brother Jaden has always been a baseball guy. Like Bryce, Jaden's route to where he finds himself today has been interesting, but with fewer twists and turns along the way. Possibly, as a result of watching an older sibling go through some things and benefitting from lessons learned there, Jaden's journey has been more predictable and straightforward.

From an early age, Jaden showed promise with his glove, his bat, his arm, and his general athletic ability. His first experiences with team play were as a Little Leaguer where, as an 11-year-old, his team advanced to the New York State Championship tournament and won it. Jaden began interscholastic baseball as a 9th grader on the Colonie High School's freshman team. From the ages of 13 through 18 he also played summer ball with the PGBA's South Troy Dodgers. (PGBA – Perfect Game Baseball – is

a New-York-based baseball scouting service.) As a sophomore, Jaden transferred from public school to Christian Brothers Academy (CBA), a local military prep school. He said that was a big change for him with uniforms, marching, military style decorum and discipline, but in retrospect, he acknowledges that it was a positive experience that has served him well now that he is older. He had a good baseball season there, starting on the junior varsity team. Jaden remembers missing his brother Bryce very much during that year.

Although he had enjoyed his time at CBA, Jaden and his parents made the decision to transfer him to VES his sophomore year, where he would join brother Bryce. Jaden said having his brother already settled there was a great help to him. The family separation was still difficult for Camesha and Rahim, but at least they knew their sons had each other for companionship and support.

Jaden started at 3rd base for the VES varsity team his first season, and at shortstop his junior and senior years. He had D-1 aspirations, as his brother had, but rather than going to a “pedigree” school with stiffer competition and the risk of less



playing time to put on film, Jaden and his parents decided he would begin his college career at Harford Community College in Maryland. The Watermans had moved to Maryland the previous year, and Jaden would be able to live at home with them. At Harford, he felt he would not only have more playing time, but also be able to focus more on his academics. Building both his GPA and further developing his baseball skills, he hoped to improve his chances for an offer from a D-1 school after two years at Harford.



At Harford, he felt he would not only have more playing time, but also be able to focus more on his academics.

At the end of the interviews with Bryce and Jaden we posed a hypothetical question: If they could go back in time and offer advice to their younger selves based on lessons learned, what would it be?

Bryce said, “Stay balanced. Remember that sports are important, but they aren’t everything. Some D-1 programs can be brutal. If you are going to make D-1 a priority, be ready for it to take everything you have (and maybe more), with no guarantee of success or satisfaction. Remember to always make time for family, friends, personal interests, and creative expression. And especially, remember that true success and self-determination starts with a strong and supportive family.”

Jaden said, “Stay balanced. Reach for your goals. Push yourself but keep things in perspective. And remember that family matters. Nothing else even comes close.” ■

BRIAN WEBB is a freelance writer based in Albany, New York.

IS FOMO RUINING YOUTH SPORTS?

BY JOHN O'SULLIVAN

I remember the day I coached my son TJ's first soccer game. He was only five, and I was so proud, so excited, and couldn't wait for him to play the game I loved.

There was one problem.

He didn't want to play.



Parents, I give you permission to take a deep breath, look at the evidence, and choose a different path. I give you permission to love your kids for where they are today, and not what they could be tomorrow. I give you permission to love yourself, even when you say no to a coach or a great opportunity because you simply cannot add one more thing to your plate or that of your child.

When the game was about to start, he said, “Dad I don’t want to play today.” I was OK with it and the game went on. That week he went to practice, had lots of fun, and I thought all was right in the world. The next weekend, I was equally as excited for TJ to play his first game. Sadly, he was not.

As I set starting lineup he again said: “Dad I don’t want to play.” I don’t think he liked the screaming parents and coaches from the previous game, as well as all the hustle and bustle that is five-year-old soccer.

This time I was angry. I was embarrassed. I was this A licensed, “all-star coach” and my own son refused to play. TJ, on the other hand, found a cricket to play with over by the fence. He was content. I was a mess.

What is wrong with my son? Why won’t he play? What if he doesn’t like soccer? Isn’t he going to fall behind?

On the car ride home, I felt the need to address this issue, (likely to make myself feel better, as he was fine.) “So TJ...” was all I could say before my wife, who was in the passenger’s seat, karate chopped me across the chest.

“What was that for?” I asked her incredulously.

“Really, didn’t you just write a whole book about this?” she said with a stern look.

Indeed I had. But I was scared. I was afraid TJ was missing out on a game I loved. I suffered from FOMO: the Fear Of Missing Out!

On that day, and many days since, I’ve had FOMO moments watching my children play sports. I saw other kids their age who were better players, and wondered “what have I failed to do?” I still see other kids who play only one sport, improving quicker than mine, and worry mine will fall too far behind. I see kids attending additional skill training sessions and

summer camps that mine do not. And I worry that my kids may be missing out.

I know I am not alone in feeling this way. I hear from parents all the time who feel stressed and anxious about their child’s sports experience. Are my kids falling behind? If they don’t do extra training now, will they make the travel team?

Will they make the high school team? Will they have a chance to play in college? These are very legitimate concerns for the modern day sports parent. They might even keep you awake at night.

But here is the thing: they are just kids. They are fine. They need to want to do these things, not be forced to. Your child’s path is not supposed to be every other child’s path. Yet the Fear Of Missing Out is such a persistent feeling it scares me. It makes me feel inadequate as a parent. It makes me worry I’m letting my kids down. You too?

I should know better. I have seen too many times how too much, too soon ends in injuries or burnout for kids who are forced down a path they didn’t choose, or who were never asked: “do you want this?” I have seen too many 12-year-old zombies walking around fields, with no joy in their step, and their love of the game long gone.

FOMO is one of the primary drivers creating a toxic youth sports atmosphere and making so many children walk away from sports far too soon.

WE MUST OVERCOME THE FEAR.

As parents, we love our kids and we have great intentions, but FOMO causes us to focus only on the present, and not the long term. FOMO compels us to make all the decisions and steal ownership of their sporting experience. FOMO leads us to suck the enjoyment out of the sport in pursuit of dreams of stardom and scholarships. FOMO drives many sensible folks to take kids away from playing with their friends, search out the winning team, and make them specialize in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. FOMO makes us feel that we are letting our kids down by not providing them with every single opportunity, regardless of costs, time commitments, and the stress endured by our family.

Parents, I give you permission to take a deep breath, look at the evidence, and choose a different path. I give you permission to love your kids for where they are today, and not what they could be tomorrow. I give you permission to love yourself, even when you say no to a coach or a great opportunity because you simply cannot add one more thing to your plate or that of your child. I give you permission because the fear of missing out is ruining youth sports. It is time for all of us well-intentioned, well-educated parents to put a stop to the FOMO. ■



JOHN O’SULLIVAN, is a former professional soccer player and coach who quit to start the Changing The Game Project to help shift the youth sports culture back to where it once was, when the game belonged to the kids. He is the author of several books including, *Changing the Game: A Parents Guide to Raising Happy High-Performing Athletes* And *Giving Youth Sports Back to Our Kids*.

A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair tied in a bun, wearing a black athletic top. She is in a starting crouch, looking forward with a focused expression. The background is blurred, showing other people in similar poses.

CHOOSING CONFIDENCE

What if having confidence was a choice
and you could always choose it?

BY LINDA STERLING, PHD, LPC, CMPC



While it doesn't always feel like it, confidence is ultimately a choice. It often seems like confidence is out of our hands. I've lost my confidence. I just don't have it. I wasn't feeling it today. It can appear as if confidence is a thing that happens to us or that we magically find on a good day. Sometimes it seems like confidence can only come after you've been successful. I need success to be confident, but I need confidence to be successful. As you can imagine, that becomes a problematic mindset game.

Fortunately, confidence doesn't just happen out of nowhere and it doesn't require you to have success first.

You can create confidence. When you realize that you create confidence, you don't worry if you'll have it on game day. You know that if it doesn't appear automatically, you can still make confidence happen. You can choose confidence.

Once you know the techniques, you can implement or "choose" confidence, in sport and life.

Choosing confidence leaves you free to focus on other components of success.

Your effort.

You have so much more energy when you're not doubting yourself.

Your composure.

You can maintain your fire and keep your cool, when you believe in yourself.

Your game.

You're free to focus on your skills to deliver the performance you're capable of.

Your team.

You can be the teammate who picks everyone else up, because you're in a good place yourself.

You can actually relax and play. Love the game again.

Game on, right?! Now let's talk about 5 specific strategies for choosing confidence.

1 STRATEGY 1: TAKE OUT THE MIND TRASH.

Paper shrinks fear. When you get fear out of your head and onto paper, the fear loses its size. The same goes for the doubt, worries, and what-ifs.

What if I don't make the team? Will I keep my position with the new star freshman here? Am I going to come back from this injury? What if I mess up? What if coach pulls me from the lineup?

The fear in your head—the one that takes up all of your brain space and feels insurmountable—doesn't seem quite as daunting once it's on paper.

That's why I advocate doing a thought download or what I call Taking Out the Mind Trash.

Taking out the mind trash simply consists of writing down all of your fears, worries, concerns, what-ifs, or basically anything that is bothering you. Don't censor yourself. Don't worry if you write the same thing several different ways. Don't try to solve as you write. Don't judge your thoughts.

If you think it, write it.

Once you're done, you may notice you feel a little better. You also might feel kind of tired from the mental work. That's part of the process.

At this point, you can crumple up the mind trash and throw it in the trash, feeling better that you've created a little brain space. While it's totally acceptable to stop there, you can shrink that fear even more by looking over those thoughts. You'll likely realize there are really only one or two themes that are causing the distress.

Yes, all of those fears are down to one or two. See, it's shrinking! Next, get curious about the remaining fears. How real are they? What could you change? How do you want to think about them? You might find they shrink even further once you really look at them.

Taking out the mind trash is something you should do regularly to check in with yourself. This is especially important when you notice a lot of negative thoughts in the form of fears, worries, and doubts.

2 STRATEGY 2: SILENCE YOUR INNER CRITIC.

We've discussed what to do when you notice negative thoughts by taking out the mind trash. But, what do you do when negative thoughts come up in real time? What do you do when you are at practice and you can't take a break to take out the mind trash?

First, get familiar with the negative voice inside.

We all have a voice inside of us that speaks up during challenging situations. This voice likes to pop up in big moments and may hold us back from being our best. It's the voice that's a total downer and always has something negative to say.

This voice is your inner critic.

Your inner critic may prevent you from going for your goals because it doesn't want to see you fail. Don't reach out to the D1 coach. Don't try out for the best team in the state. Why bother working hard to get a starting spot? Your inner critic thinks it's sparing you from defeat but really, it's holding you back from victory.

Your inner critic may worry about the worst case scenario. It constantly worries about the what-ifs. What if I make a mistake? What if things don't go my way? While it may feel like it's

preparing you, it's always concerned about the negative and never the positive.

Your inner critic may be a total hater who doubts whether you can accomplish your goals, questions your abilities, and tells you that you can't do something. When your inner critic is a hater, it likes to make ridiculous statements with no truth to back them up.

How can you silence your inner-critic in order to show up your best?

1 | Get to know your inner critic.

Ask yourself when your inner critic likes to show up? And what does it say to you?

2 | Question your inner critic.

Is there any truth to what your inner critic says? What is the evidence? Bonus points if you can come up with a counter argument to what your inner critic says!

3 | Stick up for yourself against your inner critic.

If someone said these statements to you to your best friend, how would you respond?

4 | Ask yourself what would be different if your inner critic wasn't there?

Decide not to let that voice hold you back. Notice when your inner critic shows up and choose to be positive and lift yourself up instead.

3 STRATEGY 3: PEP-TALK.

How many times have you listened to a pre-game speech that had you pumped up? How about a time someone complimented you or gave you a shout out and it boosted your confidence?

What if you could do this for yourself? What if you could celebrate what you're great at and give yourself a shout out to feel confident whenever you needed it?

That's where your own pep-talk comes in.

Start by writing down your favorite quote, phrase, song, or mantra that gives you confidence. Choose something that really resonates with you and makes you feel like your most confident self.

Then, write down your strengths. Don't let humble hold you back here. This is a time to really lean into what makes you great!

Next, find the factors which help you feel confident going into a competition.

If you don't know, reflect and think back to a time when you felt most confident going into a competition. Think about how you can you recreate those thoughts, feelings, and actions in order to turn on your confidence. Discovering what has worked in the past will help you to unleash your inner swagger which allows you to show up your best.

Lastly, remind yourself of past accomplishments and reasons you are proud of yourself. Put this all together and pull out your pep-talk when you need that confidence boost.

4 **STRATEGY 4:** **TAKE BELIEVE ON PURPOSE** **BREAKS.**

You've created a pep-talk but I know a pep-talk you believe in when you're feeling down can be challenging. Sometimes we don't believe those positive thoughts and statements even if we really want to. This strategy will show you how to get past any resistance.

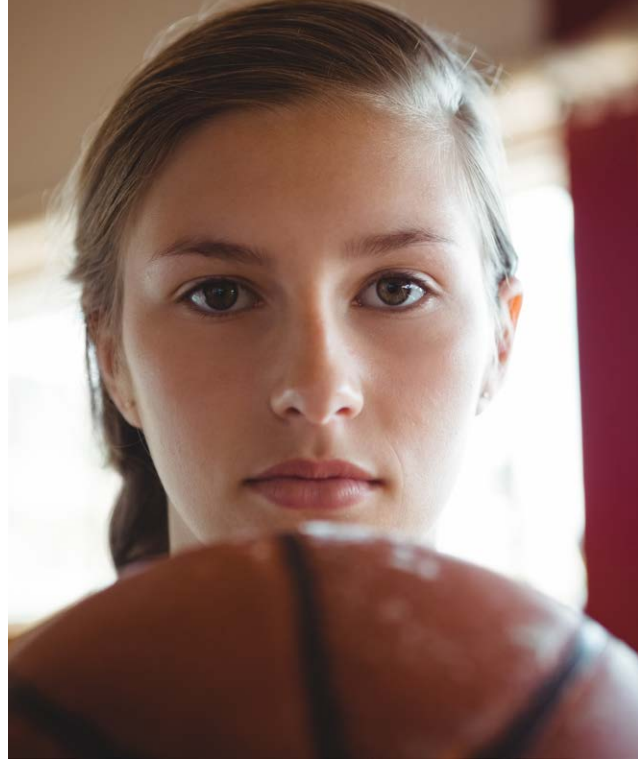
When you're looking for confidence, where do you look to find it?

Are you turning to others to provide you with confidence? For example, expecting praise from others in order to build you up. Are you continually trying to improve your weaknesses without acknowledging your strengths? Do you watch motivational videos in hopes that they will give you the confidence you need?

At the end of the day, there is only one place where you will find your confidence. **YOU!** Confidence comes from within you. It comes from the thoughts and beliefs that you have about yourself.

Our thoughts determine our feelings, actions, and results...and that's amazing! Why? Because you get to choose your thoughts!

If you want to build your confidence, ask yourself what you need to remind yourself of daily. What do you need to think and believe on purpose?



Daily reminders might look something like:

"I am a game changer!"

"I will get recruited to the school of my dreams."

"I have the skills and abilities to be a starter."

"All of my hard work and dedication has led me to winning this competition."

Take some time to figure out what you need to believe on purpose in order to find the confidence you've been looking for. Then, repeat these statements to yourself daily.

To really fuel these beliefs, add in visualizing what it will look like and feel like. Visualize what it looks like and feels like to be a game changer. What would it look like and feel like to get recruited to the school of your dreams?

Once you have that down, spend time daily believing those thoughts on purpose and visualizing what it will look like and feel like to get there.

5 STRATEGY 5: CELEBRATE YOUR WINS.

How often do you take the time to celebrate your wins?

As athletes, we tend to focus on where we need improvement or what we could have done better.

And when we do well, we think “yeah well that’s what’s expected of me,” instead of celebrating it.

Both can slowly eat away at your confidence. When you’re focusing on what needs to be better, and never celebrate what you do well, your mindset gets stuck on the negative. When you have a “yeah whatever” attitude when things go well but it’s the end of the world when things go wrong, your mind doesn’t understand what you want.

You say you want one thing, but then you don’t even bother to give yourself credit for doing it well.

Whether it’s big or small, celebrating wins is a key component to gaining and maintaining your confidence.

There are two ways to do this.

1. At the end of each day ask yourself, What are 3-5 things that went well today? These don’t have to be huge wins, but make sure to acknowledge them and celebrate them, even if it’s only a small “Way to go!” to yourself.
2. Once a week ask yourself, What are 3-5 reasons I’m proud of myself this week? Maybe it’s just surviving the week or maybe it’s acing a test. Make sure to celebrate those wins and what makes you proud.

Now you’ve got the skills to build your confidence, all you’ve got to do is put in the mental reps.

Putting in the Mental Reps:

- Take out the mind trash when needed or make it a daily habit to free up your brain space for what really matters.
- Become aware of your inner critic and when it shows up. Find what works for you in silencing that voice and repeat the process any time you notice your inner critic is present.
- Read through your pep-talk daily or on competition day when you know you want to be feeling confident and ready to compete!
- Make it a habit to spend time believing your thought on purpose and visualizing what it looks like to believe (and achieve) that thought!
- Celebrate your wins on a daily or weekly basis!

Keep in mind these aren’t one-time use only. You can (and should) use these confidence-boosting skills regularly. Remember, you don’t find confidence, you choose it.

LINDA STERLING, PHD, CMPC, a former collegiate softball player, has masters and doctoral degrees in Counseling Psychology and Sport Psychology and is a licensed professional counselor and Certified Mental Performance Consultant. To learn more about her approach, visit sterlingsportmindset.com ■

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A young female athlete is captured mid-jump in a gymnasium. She is wearing a blue and black leotard. Her arms are extended outwards and upwards, and her legs are in a jumping position. The background shows the complex metal truss structure of a large indoor arena. The entire image has a dark blue overlay.

KEEPING YOUR ATHLETE IN THE GAME

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MVP PARENT is committed to providing a credible resource that educates and supports the parents of youth athletes. **MVP PARENT** gives parents the information they need to keep youth athletes performing at the highest level physically, mentally, and emotionally. **MVP PARENT** takes a holistic and evidence-based approach to injury prevention, skill development, nutrition, and sports psychology.