UPDATED EDITION

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mindset

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS

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—Bill Gates, *GatesNotes*

Chapter 4

SPORTS: THE MINDSET OF A CHAMPION

In sports, everybody believes in talent. Even—or especially—the experts. In fact, sports is where the idea of "a natural" comes from—someone who looks like an athlete, moves like an athlete, and is an athlete, all without trying. So great is the belief in natural talent that many scouts and coaches search only for naturals, and teams will vie with each other to pay exorbitant amounts to recruit them.

Billy Beane was a natural. Everyone agreed he was the next Babe Ruth.

But Billy Beane lacked one thing. The mindset of a champion.

As Michael Lewis tells us in *Moneyball*, by the time Beane was a sophomore in high school, he was the highest scorer on the basketball team, the quarterback of the football team, and the best hitter on the baseball team, batting .500 in one of the toughest leagues in the country. His talent was real enough.

But the minute things went wrong, Beane searched for something to break. " It wasn't merely that he didn't like to fail; it was as if he didn't know how to fail."

As he moved up in baseball from the minor leagues to the majors, things got worse and worse. Each at-bat became a nightmare, another opportunity for humiliation, and with every botched at-bat, he went to pieces. As one scout said, "Billy was of the opinion that he should never make an out." Sound familiar?

Did Beane try to fix his problems in constructive ways? No, of course not, because this is a story of the fixed mindset. Natural talent should not need effort. Effort is for the others, the less endowed. Natural talent does not ask for help. It is an admission of weakness. In short, the natural does not analyze his deficiencies and coach or practice them away. The very idea of deficiencies is terrifying.

Being so imbued with the fixed mindset, Beane was trapped. Trapped by his huge talent. Beane the player never recovered from the fixed mindset, but Beane

the incredibly successful major-league executive did. How did this happen?

There was another player who lived and played side by side with Beane in the minors and in the majors, Lenny Dykstra. Dykstra did not have a fraction of Beane's physical endowment or "natural ability," but Beane watched him in awe. As Beane later described, " He had no concept of failure….And I was the opposite."

Beane continues, "I started to get a sense of what a baseball player was and I could see it wasn't me. It was Lenny."

As he watched, listened, and mulled it over, it dawned on Beane that mindset was more important than talent. And not long after that, as part of a group that pioneered a radically new approach to scouting and managing, he came to believe that scoring runs—the whole point of baseball—was much more about process than about talent.

Armed with these insights, Beane, as general manager of the 2002 Oakland Athletics, led his team to a season of 103 victories—winning the division championship and almost breaking the American League record for consecutive wins. The team had the second-lowest payroll in baseball! They didn't buy talent, they bought mindset.

THE IDEA OF THE NATURAL

Now You See It, Now You Don't

Physical endowment is not like intellectual endowment. It's visible. Size, build, agility are all visible. Practice and training are also visible, and they produce visible results. You would think that this would dispel the myth of the natural. You could *see* Muggsy Bogues at five foot three playing NBA basketball, and Doug Flutie, the small quarterback who played for the New England Patriots and the San Diego Chargers. You could see Pete Gray, the one-armed baseball player who made it to the major leagues. Ben Hogan, one of the greatest golfers of all time, who was completely lacking in grace. Glenn Cunningham, the great runner, who had badly burned and damaged legs. Larry Bird and his lack of swiftness. You can *see* the small or graceless or even "disabled" ones who make it, and the god-like specimens who don't. Shouldn't this tell people something?

Boxing experts relied on physical measurements, called "tales of the tape," to

identify naturals. They included measurements of the fighter's fist, reach, chest expansion, and weight. Muhammad Ali failed these measurements. He was not a natural. He had great speed but he didn't have the physique of a great fighter, he didn't have the strength, and he didn't have the classical moves. In fact, he boxed all wrong. He didn't block punches with his arms and elbows. He punched in rallies like an amateur. He kept his jaw exposed. He pulled back his torso to evade the impact of oncoming punches, which Jose Torres said was "like someone in the middle of a train track trying to avoid being hit by an oncoming train, not by moving to one or the other side of the track, but by running backwards."

Sonny Liston, Ali's adversary, *was* a natural. He had it all—the size, the strength, and the experience. His power was legendary. It was unimaginable that Ali could beat Sonny Liston. The matchup was so ludicrous that the arena was only half full for the fight.

But aside from his quickness, Ali's brilliance was his mind. His brains, not his brawn. He sized up his opponent and went for his mental jugular. Not only did he study Liston's fighting style, but he closely observed what kind of person Liston was out of the ring: "I read everything I could where he had been interviewed. I talked with people who had been around him or had talked with him. I would lay in bed and put all of the things together and think about them, and try to get a picture of how his mind worked." And then he turned it against him.

Why did Ali appear to "go crazy" before each fight? Because, Torres says, he knew that a knockout punch is the one they don't see coming. Ali said, "Liston had to believe that I was crazy. That I was capable of doing anything. He couldn't see nothing to me at all but mouth and that's all I wanted him to see!"

> Float like a butterfly,
> Sting like a bee
> Your hands can't hit
> What your eyes can't see.

Ali's victory over Liston is boxing history. A famous boxing manager reflects on Ali:

> “ He was a paradox. His physical performances in the ring were absolutely wrong….Yet, his brain was always in perfect working condition.” “He showed us all,” he continued with a broad smile written across his face, “that all victories come from here,” hitting his forehead with his index finger. Then he raised a pair of fists, saying: “Not from here.”

This didn’t change people’s minds about physical endowment. No, we just look back at Ali now, with our hindsight, and see the body of a great boxer. It was gravy that his mind was so sharp and that he made up amusing poems, but we still think his greatness resided in his physique. And we don’t understand how the experts failed to see that greatness right from the start.

Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan wasn’t a natural, either. He was the hardest-working athlete, perhaps in the history of sport.

It is well known that Michael Jordan was cut from the high school varsity team—we laugh at the coach who cut him. He wasn’t recruited by the college he wanted to play for (North Carolina State). Well, weren’t *they* foolish? He wasn’t drafted by the first two NBA teams that could have chosen him. What a blooper! Because now we know he was the greatest basketball player ever, and we think it should have been obvious from the start. When we look at him we see *MICHAEL JORDAN*. But at that point he was only Michael Jordan.

When Jordan was cut from the varsity team, he was devastated. His mother says, “I told him to go back and discipline himself.” Boy, did he listen. He used to leave the house at six in the morning to go practice before school. At the University of North Carolina, he constantly worked on his weaknesses—his defensive game and his ball handling and shooting. The coach was taken aback by his willingness to work harder than anyone else. Once, after the team lost the last game of the season, Jordan went and practiced his shots for hours. He was preparing for the next year. Even at the height of his success and fame—after he had made himself into an athletic genius—his dogged practice remained legendary. Former Bulls assistant coach John Bach called him “a genius who constantly wants to upgrade his genius.”

For Jordan, success stems from the mind. “The mental toughness and the heart

are a lot stronger than some of the physical advantages you might have. I've always said that and I've always believed that." But other people don't. They look at Michael Jordan and they see the physical perfection that led inevitably to his greatness.

The Babe

What about Babe Ruth? Now, he was clearly no vessel of human physical perfection. Here was the guy with the famous appetites and a giant stomach bulging out of his Yankee uniform. Wow, doesn't that make him even more of a natural? Didn't he just carouse all night and then kind of saunter to the plate the next day and punch out home runs?

The Babe was not a natural, either. At the beginning of his professional career, Babe Ruth was not that good a hitter. He had a lot of power, power that came from his total commitment each time he swung the bat. When he connected, it was breathtaking, but he was highly inconsistent.

It's true that he could consume astounding amounts of liquor and unheard-of amounts of food. After a huge meal, he could eat one or more whole pies for dessert. But he could also discipline himself when he had to. Many winters, he worked out the entire off-season at the gym to become more fit. In fact, after the 1925 season, when it looked as though he was washed up, he really committed himself to getting in shape, and it worked. From 1926 through 1931, he batted .354, averaging 50 home runs a year and 155 runs batted in. Robert Creamer, his biographer, says, "Ruth put on the finest display of sustained hitting that baseball has ever seen….From the ashes of 1925, Babe Ruth rose like a rocket." Through discipline.

He also loved to practice. In fact, when he joined the Boston Red Sox, the veterans resented him for wanting to take batting practice every day. He wasn't just a rookie; he was a rookie *pitcher*. Who did he think he was, trying to take batting practice? One time, later in his career, he was disciplined and was banned from a game. That was one thing. But they wouldn't let him practice, either, and that *really* hurt.

Ty Cobb argued that being a pitcher helped Ruth develop his hitting. Why would being a pitcher help his batting? " He could experiment at the plate," Cobb said. "No one cares much if a pitcher strikes out or looks bad at bat, so Ruth could take that big swing. If he missed, it didn't matter….As time went on,

he learned more and more about how to control that big swing and put the wood on the ball. By the time he became a fulltime outfielder, he was ready."

Yet we cling fast to what Stephen Jay Gould calls "the common view that ballplayers are hunks of meat, naturally and effortlessly displaying the talents that nature provided."

The Fastest Women on Earth

What about Wilma Rudolph, hailed as the fastest woman on earth after she won three gold medals for sprints and relay in the 1960 Rome Olympics? She was far from a physical wonder as a youngster. She was a premature baby, the twentieth of twenty-two children born to her parents, and a constantly sick child. At four years of age, she nearly died of a long struggle with double pneumonia, scarlet fever, and polio(!), emerging with a mostly paralyzed left leg. Doctors gave her little hope of ever using it again. For eight years, she vigorously pursued physical therapy, until at age twelve she shed her leg brace and began to walk normally.

If this wasn't a lesson that physical skills could be developed, what was? She immediately went and applied that lesson to basketball and track, although she lost every race she entered in her first official track meet. After her incredible career, she said, "I just want to be remembered as a hardworking lady."

What about Jackie Joyner-Kersee, hailed as the greatest female athlete of all time? Between 1985 and the beginning of 1996, she won every heptathlon she competed in. What exactly is a heptathlon? It's a grueling two-day, seven-part event consisting of a 100-meter hurdles race, the high jump, the javelin throw, a 200-meter sprint, the long jump, the shotput, and an 800-meter run. No wonder the winner gets to be called the best female athlete in the world. Along the way, Joyner-Kersee earned the six highest scores in the history of the sport, set world records, and won two world championships as well as two Olympic gold medals (six if we count the ones in other events).

Was she a natural? Talent she had, but when she started track, she finished in last place for quite some time. The longer she worked, the faster she got, but she still didn't win any races. Finally, she began to win. What changed? "Some might attribute my transformation to the laws of heredity….But I think it was my reward for all those hours of work on the bridle path, the neighborhood sidewalks and the schoolhouse corridors."

Sharing the secret of her continued success, she says, “ There is something about seeing myself improve that motivates and excites me. It’s that way now, after six Olympic medals and five world records. And it was the way I was in junior high, just starting to enter track meets.”

Her last two medals (a world-championship and an Olympic medal) came during an asthma attack and a severe, painful hamstring injury. It was not natural talent taking its course. It was mindset having its say.

Naturals Shouldn’t Need Effort

Did you know there was once a strong belief that you couldn’t physically train for golf, and that if you built your strength you would lose your “touch”? Until Tiger Woods came along with his workout regimes and fierce practice habits and won every tournament there was to win.

In some cultures, people who tried to go beyond their natural talent through training received sharp disapproval. You were supposed to accept your station in life. These cultures would have hated Maury Wills. Wills was an eager baseball player in the 1950s and ’60s with a dream to be a major leaguer. His problem was that his hitting wasn’t good enough, so when the Dodgers signed him, they sent him down to the minor leagues. He proudly announced to his friends, “In two years, I’m going to be in Brooklyn playing with Jackie Robinson.”

He was wrong. Despite his optimistic prediction and grueling daily practice, he languished in the minors for eight and a half years. At the seven-and-a-half-year mark, the team manager made a batting suggestion, telling Wills, “You’re in a seven-and-a-half-year slump, you have nothing to lose.” Shortly thereafter, when the Dodger shortstop broke his toe, Wills was called up. He had his chance.

His batting was *still* not good enough. Not ready to give up, he went to the first-base coach for help; they worked together several hours a day aside from Wills’s regular practice. Still not good enough. Even the gritty Wills was now ready to quit, but the first-base coach refused to let him. Now that the mechanics were in place, Wills needed work on his mind.

He began to hit—and, with his great speed, he began to steal bases. He studied the throws of the opposing pitchers and catchers, figuring out the best moment to steal a base. He developed sudden, powerful takeoffs and effective slides. His stealing began to distract the pitchers, throw off the catchers, and thrill the fans.

Wills went on to break Ty Cobb's record for stolen bases, a record unchallenged for forty-seven years. That season, he was voted the most valuable player in the National League.

Sports IQ

You would think the sports world would *have* to see the relation between practice and improvement—and between the mind and performance—and stop harping so much on innate physical talent. Yet it's almost as if they refuse to see. Perhaps it's because, as Malcolm Gladwell suggests, people prize natural endowment over earned ability. As much as our culture talks about individual effort and self-improvement, deep down, he argues, we revere the naturals. We like to think of our champions and idols as superheroes who were born different from us. We don't like to think of them as relatively ordinary people who made themselves extraordinary. Why not? To me that is so much more amazing.

Even when experts are willing to recognize the role of the mind, they continue to insist that it's all innate!

This really hit me when I came upon an article about Marshall Faulk, the great running back for the St. Louis Rams football team. Faulk had just become the first player to gain a combined two thousand rushing and receiving yards in four consecutive seasons.

The article, written on the eve of the 2002 Super Bowl, talked about Faulk's uncanny skill at knowing where every player on the field is, even in the swirling chaos of twenty-two running and falling players. He not only knows where they are, but he also knows what they are doing, and what they are *about* to do. According to his teammates, he's never wrong.

Incredible. How does he do it? As Faulk tells it, he spent years and years watching football. In high school he even got a job as a ballpark vendor, which he hated, in order to watch pro football. As he watched, he was always asking the question *Why?:* "Why are we running this play?" "Why are we attacking it this way?" "Why are they doing that?" "Why are they doing this?" "That question," Faulk says, "basically got me involved in football in a more in-depth way." As a pro, he never stopped asking why and probing deeper into the workings of the game.

Clearly, Faulk himself sees his skills as the product of his insatiable curiosity and study.

How do players and coaches see it? As a gift. “Marshall has the highest football IQ of any position player I’ve ever played with,” says a veteran teammate. Other teammates describe his ability to recognize defensive alignments flawlessly as a “savant’s gift.” In awe of his array of skills, one coach explained: “It takes a very innate football intelligence to do all that.”

“CHARACTER”

But aren’t there some naturals, athletes who really seem to have “it” from the start? Yes, and as it was for Billy Beane and John McEnroe, sometimes it’s a curse. With all the praise for their talent and with how little they’ve needed to work or stretch themselves, they can easily fall into a fixed mindset. Bruce Jenner (now Caitlyn Jenner), 1976 Olympic gold medalist in the decathlon, says, “If I wasn’t dyslexic, I probably wouldn’t have won the Games. If I had been a better reader, then that would have come easily, sports would have come easily…and I never would have realized that the way you get ahead in life is hard work.”

The naturals, carried away with their superiority, don’t learn how to work hard or how to cope with setbacks. This is the story of Pedro Martinez, the brilliant pitcher then with the Boston Red Sox, who self-destructed when they needed him most. But it’s an even larger story too, a story about character.

A group of sportswriters from *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* were on the Delta shuttle to Boston. So was I. They were headed to Game 3 of the 2003 American League play-off series between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox. They were talking about character, and they all agreed—the Boston writers reluctantly—that the Yankees had it.

Among other things, they remembered what the Yankees had done for New York two years before. It was October 2001, and New Yorkers had just lived through September 11. I was there and we were devastated. We needed some hope. The city needed the Yankees to go for it—to go for the World Series. But the Yankees had lived through it, too, and they were injured and exhausted. They seemed to have nothing left. I don’t know where they got it from, but they dug down deep and they polished off one team after another, each win bringing us a little bit back to life, each one giving us a little more hope for the future. Fueled by our need, they became the American League East champs, then the American League champs, and then they were in the World Series, where they made a

valiant run and almost pulled it off. Everyone hates the Yankees. It's the team the whole country roots against. I grew up hating the Yankees, too, but after that I had to love them. This is what the sportswriters meant by character.

Character, the sportswriters said. They know it when they see it—it's the ability to dig down and find the strength even when things are going against you.

The very next day, Pedro Martinez, the dazzling but over-pampered Boston pitcher, showed what character meant. By showing what it isn't.

No one could have wanted this American League Championship more than the Boston Red Sox. They hadn't won a World Series in eighty-five years, ever since the curse of the Bambino—that is, ever since Sox owner Harry Frazee sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees for money to finance a Broadway show. It was bad enough that he was selling the best left-handed pitcher in baseball (which Ruth was at the time), but he was selling him to the despised enemy.

The Yankees went on to dominate baseball, winning, it seemed, endless World Series. Meanwhile Boston made it to four World Series and several play-offs, but they always lost. And they always lost in the most tragic way possible. By coming achingly near to victory and then having a meltdown. Here, finally, was another chance to fight off the curse *and* defeat their archrivals. If they won, they would make that trip to the World Series and the Yankees would stay home. Pedro Martinez was their hope. In fact, earlier in the season, he had cursed the curse.

Yet after pitching a beautiful game, Martinez was losing his lead and falling behind. What did he do then? He hit a batter with the ball (Karim Garcia), threatened to bean another (Jorge Posada), and hurled a seventy-two-year-old man to the ground (Yankee coach Don Zimmer).

As *New York Times* writer Jack Curry wrote: "We knew we were going to have Pedro vs. Roger [Clemens] on a memorable afternoon at Fenway Park….But no one expected to watch Pedro against Garcia, Pedro against Posada, Pedro against Zimmer."

Even the Boston writers were aghast. Dan Shaughnessy, of the *Globe*, asked: "Which one would you rather have now, Red Sox fans? Roger Clemens, who kept his composure and behaved like a professional Saturday night, winning the game for his team despite his obvious anger? Or Martinez, the baby who hits a guy after he blows the lead, then points at his head and at Yankees catcher Jorge Posada, threatening, 'You're next'?…Red Sox fans don't like to hear this, but Martinez was an embarrassment Saturday, and a disgrace to baseball. He gets

away with it because he's Pedro. And the Sox front office enables him. Could Martinez one time stand up and admit he's wrong?"

Like Billy Beane, Pedro Martinez did not know how to tolerate frustration, did not know how to dig down and turn an important setback into an important win. Nor, like Billy Beane, could he admit his faults and learn from them. Because he threw his tantrum instead of doing the job, the Yankees won the game and went on to win the play-off by one game.

The sportswriters on the plane agreed that character is all. But they confessed that they didn't understand where it comes from. Yet I think by now we're getting the idea that character grows out of mindset.

We now know that there is a mindset in which people are enmeshed in the idea of their own talent and specialness. When things go wrong, they lose their focus and their ability, putting everything they want—and in this case, everything the team and the fans so desperately want—in jeopardy.

We also know that there is a mindset that helps people cope well with setbacks, points them to good strategies, and leads them to act in their best interest.

Wait. The story's not over. One year later, the Sox and the Yankees went head-to-head again. Whoever won four games out of the seven would be the American League Champions and would take that trip to the World Series. The Yankees won the first three games, and Boston's humiliating fate seemed sealed once again.

But that year Boston had put their prima donnas on notice. They traded one, tried to trade another (no one wanted him), and sent out the message: This is a team, not a bunch of stars. We work hard for each other.

Four games later, the Boston Red Sox were the American League Champions. And then the World Champions. It was the first time since 1904 that Boston had beaten the Yankees in a championship series, showing two things. First, that the curse was over. And second, that character can be learned.

More About Character

Let's take it from the top with Pete Sampras and the growth mindset. In 2000, Sampras was at Wimbledon, trying for his thirteenth Grand Slam tennis victory. If he won, he would break Roy Emerson's record of twelve wins in top

tournaments. Although Sampras managed to make it to the finals, he had not played that well in the tournament and was not optimistic about his chances against the young, powerful Patrick Rafter.

Sampras lost the first set, and was about to lose the second set. He was down 4–1 in the tiebreaker. Even he said, “I really felt like it was slipping away.” What would McEnroe have done? What would Pedro Martinez have done? What did Sampras do?

As William Rhoden puts it, “He…searched for a frame of reference that could carry him through.” Sampras says, “When you’re sitting on the changeover you think of past matches that you’ve lost the first set…came back and won the next three. There’s time. You reflect on your past experiences, being able to get through it.”

Suddenly, Sampras had a five-point run. Then two more. He had won the second set and he was alive.

“Last night,” Rhoden says, “Sampras displayed all the qualities of the hero: the loss in the first set, vulnerability near defeat, then a comeback and a final triumph.”

Jackie Joyner-Kersee talked herself through an asthma attack during her last world championship. She was in the 800-meter race, the last event of the heptathlon, when she felt the attack coming on. “ Just keep pumping your arms,” she instructed herself. “It’s not that bad, so keep going. You can make it. You’re not going to have a full-blown attack. You have enough air. You’ve got this thing won….Just run as hard as you can in this last 200 meters, Jackie.” She instructed herself all the way to victory. “I have to say this is my greatest triumph, considering the competition and the ups and downs I was going through….If I really wanted it, I had to pull it together.”

In her last Olympics, the dreaded thing happened. A serious hamstring injury forced her to drop out of the heptathlon. She was devastated. She was no longer a contender in her signature event, but would she be a contender in the long jump a few days later? Her first five jumps said no. They were nowhere near medal level. But the sixth jump won her a bronze medal, more precious than her gold ones. “ The strength for that sixth jump came from my assorted heartbreaks over the years…I’d collected all my pains and turned them into one mighty performance.”

Joyner-Kersee, too, displayed all the qualities of a hero: the loss, the vulnerability near defeat, then a comeback and a final triumph.

It goes by different names, but it's the same thing. It's what makes you practice, and it's what allows you to dig down and pull it out when you most need it.

Remember how McEnroe told us all the things that went wrong to make him lose each match he lost? There was the time it was cold and the time it was hot, the time he was jealous and the times he was upset, and the many, many times he was distracted. But, as Billie Jean King tells us, the mark of a champion is the ability to win when things are not quite right—when you're not playing well and your emotions are not the right ones. Here's how she learned what being a champion meant.

King was in the finals at Forest Hills playing against Margaret Smith (later Margaret Smith Court), who was at the peak of her greatness. King had played her more than a dozen times and had beaten her only once. In the first set, King played fabulously. She didn't miss a volley and built a nice lead. Suddenly, the set was over. Smith had won it.

In the second set, King again built a commanding lead and was serving to win the set. Before she knew it, Smith had won the set and the match.

At first, King was perplexed. She had never built such a commanding lead in such an important match. But then she had a *Eureka!* moment. All at once, she understood what a champion was: someone who could raise their level of play when they needed to. When the match is on the line, they suddenly "get around three times tougher."

Jackie Joyner-Kersee had her *Eureka!* moment too. She was fifteen years old and competing in the heptathlon at the AAU Junior Olympics. Everything now depended on the last event, the 800-meter race, an event she dreaded. She was exhausted and she was competing against an expert distance runner whose times she had never matched. She did this time. "I felt a kind of high. I'd proven that I could win if I wanted it badly enough….That win showed me that I could not only compete with the best athletes in the country, I could *will* myself to win."

Often called the best woman soccer player in the world, Mia Hamm says she was always asked, "Mia, what is the most important thing for a soccer player to have?" With no hesitation, she answered, "Mental toughness." And she didn't mean some innate trait. When eleven players want to knock you down, when you're tired or injured, when the referees are against you, you can't let any of it affect your focus. How do you do that? You have to *learn* how. " It is," said

Hamm, “one of the most difficult aspects of soccer and the one I struggle with every game and every practice.”

By the way, did Hamm think she was the greatest player in the world? No. “And because of that,” she said, “someday I just might be.”

In sports, there are always do-or-die situations, when a player must come through or it’s all over. Jack Nicklaus, the famed golfer, was in these situations many times in his long professional career on the PGA Tour—where the tournament rested on his making a must-have shot. If you had to guess, how many of these shots do you think he missed? The answer is one. One!

That’s the championship mentality. It’s how people who are not as talented as their opponents win games. John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach, tells one of my favorite stories. Once, while Wooden was still a high school coach, a player was unhappy because he wasn’t included in the big games. The player, Eddie Pawelski, begged Wooden to give him a chance, and Wooden relented. “All right Eddie,” he said, “I’ll give you a chance. I’ll start you against Fort Wayne Central tomorrow night.”

“Suddenly,” Wooden tells us, “I wondered where those words came from.” Three teams were locked in a battle for number one in Indiana—one was his team and another was Fort Wayne Central, tomorrow night’s team.

The next night, Wooden started Eddie. He figured that Eddie would last at most a minute or two, especially since he was up against Fort Wayne’s Armstrong, the toughest player in the state.

“Eddie literally took him apart,” Wooden reports. “Armstrong got the lowest point total of his career. Eddie scored 12, and our team showed the best balance of all season….But in addition to his scoring, his defense, rebounding, and play-making were excellent.” Eddie never sat out again and was named most valuable player for the next two years.

All of these people had character. None of them thought they were special people, born with the right to win. They were people who worked hard, who learned how to keep their focus under pressure, and who stretched beyond their ordinary abilities when they had to.

Staying on Top

Character is what allows you to reach the top *and stay there.* Darryl Strawberry,

Mike Tyson, and Martina Hingis reached the top, but they didn't stay there. Isn't that because they had all kinds of personal problems and injuries? Yes, but so have many other champions. Ben Hogan was hit by a bus and was physically destroyed, but he made it back to the top.

" I believe ability can get you to the top," says coach John Wooden, "but it takes character to keep you there….It's so easy to…begin thinking you can just 'turn it on' automatically, without proper preparation. It takes real character to keep working as hard or even harder once you're there. When you read about an athlete or team that wins over and over and over, remind yourself, 'More than ability, they have character.' "

Let's take an even deeper look at what character means, and how the growth mindset creates it. Stuart Biddle and his colleagues measured adolescents' and young adults' mindset about athletic ability. Those with the fixed mindset were the people who believed that:

"You have a certain level of ability in sports and you cannot really do much to change that level."

"To be good at sports you need to be naturally gifted."

In contrast, the people with the growth mindset agreed that:

"How good you are at sports will *always* improve if you work harder at it."

"To be successful in sports, you need to learn techniques and skills and practice them regularly."

Those with the growth mindset were the ones who showed the most character or heart. They were the ones who had the minds of champions. What do I mean? Let's look at the findings from these sports researchers and see.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Finding #1: Those with the growth mindset found success in doing their best, in learning and improving. And this is exactly what we find in the champions.

" For me the joy of athletics has never resided in winning," Jackie Joyner-Kersee tells us, "…I derive just as much happiness from the process as from the results. I don't mind losing as long as I see improvement or I feel I've done as well as I possibly could. If I lose, I just go back to the track and work some more."

This idea—that personal success is when you work your hardest to become your best—was central to John Wooden's life. In fact, he says, "there were many, many games that gave me as much pleasure as any of the ten national championship games we won, simply because we prepared fully and played near our highest level of ability."

Tiger Woods and Mia Hamm are two of the fiercest competitors who ever lived. They love to win, but what counted most for them is the effort they made even when they didn't win. They could be proud of that. McEnroe and Beane could not.

After the '98 Masters tournament, Woods was disappointed that he did not repeat his win of the previous year, but he felt good about his top-ten finish: "I squeezed the towel dry this week. I'm very proud of the way I hung in there." Or after a British Open, where he finished third: "Sometimes you get even more satisfaction out of creating a score when things aren't completely perfect, when you're not feeling so well about your swing."

Tiger is a hugely ambitious man. He wants to be the best, even the best ever. "But the best me—that's a little more important."

Mia Hamm tells us, "After every game or practice, if you walk off the field knowing that you gave everything you had, you will always be a winner." Why did the country fall in love with her team? " They saw that we truly love what we do and that we gave everything we had to each other and to each game."

For those with the fixed mindset, success is about establishing their superiority, pure and simple. Being that somebody who is worthier than the nobodies. " There was a time—I'll admit it," McEnroe says, "when my head was so big it could barely fit through the door." Where's the talk about effort and personal best? There is none. " Some people don't want to rehearse; they just want to perform. Other people want to practice a hundred times first. I'm in the former group." Remember, in the fixed mindset, effort is not a cause for pride. It is something that casts doubt on your talent.

WHAT IS FAILURE?

Finding #2: Those with the growth mindset found setbacks motivating. They're informative. They're a wake-up call.

Only once did Michael Jordan try to coast. It was the year he returned to the

Bulls after his stint in baseball, and he learned his lesson. The Bulls were eliminated in the play-offs. “ You can’t leave and think you can come back and dominate this game. I will be physically and mentally prepared from now on.” Truer words are rarely spoken. The Bulls won the NBA title the next three years.

Michael Jordan embraced his failures. In fact, in one of his favorite ads for Nike, he says: “I’ve missed more than nine thousand shots. I’ve lost almost three hundred games. Twenty-six times, I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot, and missed.” You can be sure that each time, he went back and practiced the shot a hundred times.

Here’s how Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the great basketball player, reacted when college basketball outlawed his signature shot, the dunk (later reinstated). Many thought that would stop his ascent to greatness. Instead, he worked twice as hard on developing other shots: his bank shot off the glass, his skyhook, and his turnaround jumper. He had absorbed the growth mindset from Coach Wooden, and put it to good use.

In the fixed mindset, setbacks label you.

John McEnroe could never stand the thought of losing. Even worse was the thought of losing to someone who was a friend or relative. That would make him less special. For example, he hoped desperately for his best friend, Peter, to lose in the finals at Maui after Peter had beaten him in an earlier round. He wanted it so badly he couldn’t watch the match. Another time, he played his brother Patrick in a finals in Chicago, and said to himself, “ God, if I lose to Patrick, that’s it. I’m jumping off the Sears tower.”

Here’s how failure motivated him. In 1979, he played mixed doubles at Wimbledon. He didn’t play mixed doubles again for twenty years. Why? He and his partner lost in three straight sets. Plus, McEnroe lost his serve twice, while no one else lost theirs even once. “That was the ultimate embarrassment. I said, ‘That’s it. I’m never playing again. I can’t handle this.’ ”

In 1981, McEnroe bought a beautiful black Les Paul guitar. That week, he went to see Buddy Guy play at the Checkerboard Lounge in Chicago. Instead of feeling inspired to take lessons or practice, McEnroe went home and smashed his guitar to pieces.

Here’s how failure motivated Sergio Garcia, another golden boy with mindset issues. Garcia had taken the golf world by storm with his great shots and his charming, boyish ways; he seemed like a younger Tiger. But when his performance took a dive, so did his charm. He fired caddie after caddie, blaming

them for everything that went wrong. He once blamed his shoe when he slipped and missed a shot. To punish the shoe, he threw it and kicked it. Unfortunately, he almost hit an official. These are the ingenious remedies for failure in the fixed mindset.

TAKING CHARGE OF SUCCESS

Finding #3: People with the growth mindset in sports (as in pre-med chemistry) took charge of the processes that bring success—and that maintain it.

How come Michael Jordan's skill didn't seem to decline with age? He did lose some stamina and agility with age, but to compensate, he worked even harder on conditioning and on his moves, like the turnaround jump shot and his celebrated fallaway jumper. He came into the league as a slam-dunker and he left as the most complete player ever to grace the game.

Woods, too, took charge of the process. Golf is like a wayward lover. When you think you've conquered her, she will certainly desert you. Butch Harmon, the renowned coach, says "the golf swing is just about the farthest thing from a perfectible discipline in athletics….The most reliable swings are only relatively repeatable. They never stop being works in progress." That's why even the biggest golf star wins only a fraction of the time, and may not win for long periods of time (which happened to Woods even at the height of his career). And that's also why taking charge of the process is so crucial.

With this in mind, Tiger's dad made sure to teach him how to manage his attention and his course strategy. Mr. Woods would make loud noises or throw things just as little Tiger was about to swing. This helped him become less distractible. (Do we know someone else who could have profited from this training?) When Tiger was three years old, his dad was already teaching him to think about course management. After Tiger drove the ball behind a big clump of trees, Mr. Woods asked the toddler what his plan was.

Woods carried on what his dad started by taking control of all parts of his game. He experimented constantly with what worked and what didn't, but he also had a long-term plan that guided him: " I know my game. I know what I want to achieve, I know how to get there."

Like Michael Jordan, Woods managed his motivation. He did this by making his practice into fun: " I love working on shots, carving them this way and that,

and proving to myself that I can hit a certain shot on command." And he did it by thinking of a rival out there somewhere who would challenge him: " He's twelve. I have to give myself a reason to work so hard. He's out there somewhere. He's twelve."

Mark O'Meara, Woods's golf partner and friend, had a choice. It's not easy to play beside someone as extraordinary as Woods. O'Meara's choice was this: He could feel jealous of and diminished by Woods's superior play, or he could learn from it. He chose the latter path. O'Meara was one of those talented players who never seemed to fulfill his potential. His choice—to take charge of his game—turned him around.

At the age of twenty-one, Woods had won the Masters Tournament. That night, he slept with his arms around his prize, the famous green jacket. One year later, he put a green jacket on Mark O'Meara.

From McEnroe, we hear little talk of taking control. When he was on top, we hear little mention of working on his game to stay on top. When he was doing poorly, we hear little self-reflection or analysis (except to pin the blame). For example, when he didn't do as well as expected for part of '82, we hear that "little things happened that kept me off my game for weeks at a time and prevented me from dominating the tour."

Always a victim of outside forces. Why didn't he take charge and learn how to perform well in spite of them? That's not the way of the fixed mindset. In fact, rather than combating those forces or fixing his problems, he tells us he wished he played a team sport, so he could conceal his flaws: "If you're not at your peak, you can hide it so much easier in a team sport."

McEnroe also admits that his on-court temper tantrums were often a cover for choking and only made things worse. So what did he do? Nothing. He wished someone else would do it for him. "When you can't control yourself, you want someone to do it for you—that's where I acutely missed being part of a team sport….People would have worked with me, coached me."

Or: " The system let me get away with more and more…I really liked it less and less." He got mad at the system! Hi there, John. This was *your* life. Ever think of taking responsibility?

No, because in the fixed mindset, you don't take control of your abilities and your motivation. You look for your talent to carry you through, and when it doesn't, well then, what else could you have done? You are not a work in progress, you're a finished product. And finished products have to protect

themselves, lament, and blame. Everything but take charge.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A STAR?

Does a star have less responsibility to the team than other players? Is it just their role to be great and win games? Or does a star have *more* responsibility than others? What does Michael Jordan think?

“ In our society sometimes it’s hard to come to grips with filling a role instead of trying to be a superstar,” says Jordan. A superstar’s talent can win games, but it’s teamwork that wins championships.

Coach John Wooden claims he was tactically and strategically average. So how did he win ten national championships? One of the main reasons, he tells us, is because he was good at getting players to fill roles as part of a *team.* “ I believe, for example, I could have made Kareem [Abdul-Jabbar] the greatest scorer in college history. I could have done that by developing the team around that ability of his. Would we have won three national championships while he was at UCLA? Never.”

In the fixed mindset, athletes want to validate their talent. This means acting like a superstar, not “just” a team member. But, as with Pedro Martinez, this mindset works against the important victories they want to achieve.

A telling tale is the story of Patrick Ewing, who could have been a basketball champion. The year Ewing was a draft pick—by far the most exciting pick of the year—the Knicks won the lottery and to their joy got to select Ewing for their team. They now had “twin towers,” the seven-foot Ewing and the seven-foot Bill Cartwright, their high-scoring center. They had a chance to do it all.

They just needed Ewing to be the power forward. He wasn’t happy with that. Center is the star position. And maybe he wasn’t sure he could hit the outside shots that a power forward has to hit. What if he had really given his all to learn that position? (Alex Rodriguez, then the best shortstop in baseball, agreed to play third base when he joined the Yankees. He had to retrain himself and, for a while, he wasn’t all he had been.) Instead, Cartwright was sent to the Bulls, and Ewing’s Knicks never won a championship.

Then there is the tale of the football player Keyshawn Johnson, another immensely talented player who was devoted to validating his own greatness. When asked before a game how he compared to a star player on the opposing

team, he replied, “You’re trying to compare a flashlight to a star. Flashlights only last so long. A star is in the sky forever.”

Was he a team player? “ I am a team player, but I’m an individual first….I have to be the No. 1 guy with the football. Not No. 2 or No. 3. If I’m not the No. 1 guy, I’m no good to you. I can’t really help you.” What does *that* mean? For his definition of *team player*, Johnson was traded by the Jets, and, after that, deactivated by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

I’ve noticed an interesting thing. When some star players are interviewed after a game, they say *we*. They are part of the team and they think of themselves that way. When others are interviewed, they say *I* and they refer to their teammates as something apart from themselves—as people who are privileged to participate in their greatness.

Every Sport Is a Team Sport

You know, just about every sport is in some sense a team sport. No one does it alone. Even in individual sports, like tennis or golf, great athletes have a team—coaches, trainers, caddies, managers, mentors. This really hit me when I read about Diana Nyad, the woman who holds the world’s record for open-water swimming. What could be more of a lone sport than swimming? All right, maybe you need a little rowboat to follow you and make sure you’re okay.

When Nyad hatched her plan, the open-water swimming record for both men and women was sixty miles. She wanted to swim one hundred. After months of arduous training, she was ready. But with her went a team of guides (for measuring the winds and the current, and watching for obstacles), divers (looking for sharks), NASA experts (for guidance on nutrition and endurance—she needed eleven hundred calories per hour and she lost twenty-nine pounds on the trip!), and trainers who talked her through uncontrollable shivers, nausea, hallucinations, and despair. Her new record was 102.5 miles. It was her name in the record books, but it took fifty-one other people to do it.

HEARING THE MINDSETS

You can already hear the mindsets in young athletes. Listen for them.

It’s 2004. Iciss Tillis is a college basketball star, a six-foot-five forward for

the Duke University women's basketball team. She has a picture of her father, James "Quick" Tillis, taped to her locker as a motivator. "But the picture is not a tribute," says sportswriter Viv Bernstein. "It is a reminder of all Tillis hopes she will never be."

Quick Tillis was a contender in the 1980s. In '81, he boxed for the world heavyweight title; in '85, he was in the movie *The Color Purple* (as a boxer); and in '86, he was the first boxer to go the distance (ten rounds) with Mike Tyson. But he never made it to the top.

Iciss Tillis, who is a senior, says, "This is the year to win a national championship. I just feel like I'd be such a failure…[I'd] feel like I'm regressing back and I'm going to end up like my dad: a nobody."

Uh-oh, it's the somebody–nobody syndrome. *If I win, I'll be somebody; if I lose I'll be nobody.*

Tillis's anger at her father may be justified—he abandoned her as a child. But this thinking is getting in her way. "Perhaps nobody else has that combination of size, skill, quickness, and vision in the women's college game," says Bernstein. "Yet few would rate Tillis ahead of the top two players in the country: Connecticut's Diana Taurasi and [Duke's Alana] Beard." Tillis's performance often fails to match her ability.

She's frustrated that people have high expectations for her and want her to play better. "I feel like I have to come out and have a triple-double [double digits in points scored, rebounds, and assists], dunk the ball over-the-head 360 [leave your feet, turn completely around in the air, and slam the ball into the basket] and maybe people will be like, 'Oh, she not that bad.' "

I don't think people want the impossible. I think they just want to see her use her wonderful talent to the utmost. I think they want her to develop the skills she needs to reach her goals.

Worrying about being a nobody is not the mindset that motivates and sustains champions. (Hard as it is, perhaps Tillis should admire the fact that her father went for it, instead of being contemptuous that he didn't quite make it.) Somebodies are not determined by whether they won or lost. Somebodies are people who go for it with all they have. If you go for it with all you have, Iciss Tillis—not just in the games, but in practice too—you will already be a somebody.

Here's the other mindset. It's six-foot-three Candace Parker, then a seventeen-year-old senior at Naperville Central High near Chicago, who was going to

Tennessee to play for the Lady Vols and their great coach, Pat Summitt.

Candace has a very different father from Iciss, a dad who is teaching her a different lesson: “If you work hard at something, you get out what you put in.”

Several years before, when he was coach of her team, her dad lost his cool with her during a tournament game. She was not going for the rebounds, she was shooting lazy shots from the outside instead of using her height near the basket, and she was not exerting herself on defense. “Now let’s go out and try harder!” So what happened? She went out and scored twenty points in the second half, and had ten rebounds. They blew the other team away. “He lit a fire under me. And I knew he was right.”

Candace lights the same fire under *herself* now. Rather than being content to be a star, she looks to improve all the time. When she returned from knee surgery, she knew what she needed to work on—her timing, nerves, and wind. When her three-point shot went bad, she asked her father to come to the gym to work on it with her. “Whether it be in basketball or everyday life,” she says, “nothing is promised.”

Only weeks later, the mindset prophecies were already coming true. Two things happened. One, sadly, is that Tillis’s team was knocked out of the championship. The other was that Candace Parker became the first woman ever to win the basketball dunking championship—against five men.

Character, heart, the mind of a champion. It’s what makes great athletes and it’s what comes from the growth mindset with its focus on self-development, self-motivation, and responsibility.

Even though the finest athletes are wildly competitive and want to be the best, greatness does not come from the ego of the fixed mindset, with its somebody–nobody syndrome. Many athletes with the fixed mindset may have been “naturals”—but you know what? As John Wooden says, we can’t remember most of them.

Grow Your Mindset

- Are there sports you always assumed you’re bad at? Well, maybe you are, but then maybe you aren’t. It’s not something you can know until you’ve put in a lot of effort. Some of the

world’s best athletes didn’t start out being that hot. If you have a passion for a sport, put in the effort and see.

- Sometimes being exceptionally endowed is a curse. These athletes may stay in a fixed mindset and not cope well with adversity. Is there a sport that came easily to you until you hit a wall? Try on the growth mindset and go for it again.
- “Character” is an important concept in the sports world, and it comes out of a growth mindset. Think about times you’ve needed to reach deep down inside in difficult sports matches. Think about the growth-mindset champions from this chapter and how they do it. What could you do next time to make sure you’re in a growth mindset in the pinch?
- Athletes with a growth mindset find success in learning and improving, not just winning. The more you can do this, the more rewarding sports will be for you—and for those who play them with you!

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