

## Game Face

Dan Abrahams, Global Sport Psychologist



Through a thorough discussion between coach and player, a student-athlete can develop a personal mantra to easily remember, repeat and use as a guide in preparation for competition.

The player will brainstorm 10 or so words to describe themselves at their best, . . . even in their dream game. Each word should be described in detail, with examples from the past or the player's creative mind. Each word should have a story behind it. From those words, the player will choose 2-3 to place in their mantra.

The final addition to phrase is the name of a player that the athlete views perfectly embodies these ideals. This is the player the athlete best identifies with on the field. She should be able to put herself in this hero's shoes and imagine what it would be like to play as that person. If the player is not familiar with players and their attributes in comparison to herself, she can choose an animal that might be commonly viewed as having these qualities. However, this needs to be after some study and careful consideration.

This idea is to keep players focused on the aspects of the game she can control vs being guided down a negative path by intrusive thoughts that derail her progress.

Dan Abrahams got permission from a couple of his clients to share their work together. For example, consider:

### **Allie Long (USWNT) - Dominant, Focused, Busquets**

- \* Allie refined Dominant, Sharp, Focused, Alive, and Lively to Dominant and Alive, then chose Sergio Busquets of Spain to model her play after.
- \* In training and in games, . . . in discussion with her coaches, . . . in every arena of competition, she behaves in the style of "Dominant, Focused, Busquets."





## Match Script

Dan Abrahams, Global Sport Psychologist

A “Match Script” differs from the idea of a “Game Face” in that this is more in depth, longer and potentially could change more from game to game or situation to situation.

Dan Abrahams got permission from a couple of his clients to share their work together. In his work with Carlton Cole (Chelsea, England), Cole was asked to describe what the England coaches wanted from him, . . . what he wanted to focus on to be successful, etc.

Cole shared he was expected to be aware of opposing Defenders and get behind them. He added that he felt it was important he be constantly in motion, to make things difficult for opponents and even went as far as to say he wanted to “bully them.”

After describing these actions in detail, taking from previous matches where he was able to do this (painting pictures and creating a successful story to draw from), Cole chose his final Match Script point from the youth song *Head - Shoulders - Knees - and Toes*. This meant: “head / eyes up, looking over your shoulder, bending your knees (moving), and always on your toes.”

Similar to the “Game Face” practice, this idea is to keep players focused on the aspects of the game they can control vs being derailed by negative thoughts.

### Carlton Cole (England)

- 1. Where Are The Defenders / Get Behind Them**
- 2. Non-Stop Movement / Bully Them.**
- 3. Head-Shoulders-Knees-Toes**

\* In every match, this is the script Cole followed. He didn't let his mind wander from the things he could control. He created a plan where he would be successful if he was able to do these things independent of the final result.



## Write a Thank You Note to Pressure

Brett Ledbetter, Author: *What Drives Winning*

In his studies, Brett Ledbetter has developed a philosophy on the ideas of “Pressure” and “Goal Setting,” among many other things. While working with many athletes, he has found one of the largest hurdles is often dealing with Pressure. This typically leads to a “Fear of Failure” many coaches are looking to eliminate.

Ledbetter recognizes pressure “creates an urgency that can help us with our development,” but also feels it is most important for athletes to separate “who they are” from “what they do.” This way, when you fall short of your goals (short or long term) that moment doesn’t define you. The idea of what you do becoming who you are is labeled as “Identity Foreclosure.”

Take some time to sit down and write a Thank You Note to Pressure. Be sure to recognize moments where you were challenged and came through successfully. You should also recognize the times you fell under pressure and how that experience later helped you.

Below you can see an example note shared by Ledbetter in the book *What Drives Winning*.

This activity allows athletes to see “pressure” and an ally and how it aides in helping us grow as athletes and people.

*Dear Pressure:*

*Thank you for making me better. You know how to expose and challenge me more than anybody in my life. I know that we haven't always had the best relationship, but now that I reflect, I realize that it's my fault. I wouldn't have been able to get to the level that I'm at...without your help.*

*I've learned that, like any friend, I need short breaks from you. When I have separation from you, I realize how much I miss you and how much you do for me. Then I'm ready to get back together and accept your challenge. Thank you for teaching me about myself—you've provided me with so many lessons that have made me a stronger person.*

*Thank you for taking me to a level that I could have never gotten to on my own!*

## Write a Letter to Soccer

Brett Ledbetter, Author: *What Drives Winning*



Brett Ledbetter has worked with a number of successful coaches and inspiring authors in creating plans for athletes to go about their sport in a healthy way. While talking with Jim Loehr, Author of *The Only Way to Win*, he was advised to challenge his clients to write a letter to the sport.

This is a similar activity to writing a Thank You Note to Pressure, but gets a little deeper into why a student began playing a particular sport and what s/he has gotten out of it.

Furthermore, this allows an opportunity to coaches to gauge how an athlete views participation in that sport. This can be very helpful as the two work together to create healthy pathways to success.

Below you can find the Author's letter to his sport, Basketball.

Put some thought into what a letter like this might look like and when you have some free time, sit down and write a letter to Soccer.

*Dear Basketball,*

*As a player, you gave me a purpose—a reason to reject social norms and carve my own path. I will always cherish the times we spent alone on Friday/Saturday nights when I didn't want to go to parties. You gave me a place to go when I was frustrated. You taught me about success. You taught me about failure. You motivated me to be better and through you I learned so much through the joy and pain that you caused me.*

*Now, you are the vehicle that allows me to help other people. And I've met so many wonderful people through you. You've put me in a position to pass on all of the lessons that I've learned through you to people so they can better understand their relationship with you. I'm very thankful for all of the success and adversity that I experienced from you—it has made me the person that I am today.*

*Love,  
Brett*

# Write Your Coach's End of Year Banquet Speech (in Regard to You)

Brett Ledbetter, Author: *What Drives Winning*



Ledbetter interviewed 15 top college men's and women's Basketball Coaches and created a list of "Character Skills" the group believed were necessary for success. He refined the list to include each skill as either falling under Performance Skills (Hard-Working, Focused, etc.) or Moral Skills (Honest, Caring, etc.). He often uses this list for clients to find key aspects they'd like to focus on.

Another common practice Ledbetter uses is to have athletes write the speech they hope their coach would give about them at an end of the year banquet. One stipulation is that they must find a way to incorporate the five Performance Skills and five Character Skills they chose to focus on all season.

Additionally, the speech should be written exactly how they'd like a coach to read it.

Create your own list of Performance and Character Skills, . . . choose five of each to describe how you would like people watching you to see. Take a moment and write the end of the year banquet speech you'd like your coach to give about you. Be sure to include your Character Skills.

Below you can see the Character Skills list Ledbetter created.

## Character Skills

### Performance Skills

Hardworking  
Competitive  
Positive  
Focused  
Accountable  
Resilient  
Confident  
Energetic  
Disciplined  
Motivated

### Moral Skills

Unselfish  
Honest  
Respectful  
Appreciative  
Humble  
Loyal  
Trustworthy  
Encouraging  
Socially Aware  
Caring

## Your “Inner Circle”

Brett Ledbetter, Author: *What Drives Winning*



In his book, *What Drives Winning*, Ledbetter details a number of stories showing how often the people we surround ourselves with view us as athletes, musicians, dancers, poets, etc. instead of a person who does those things. Teachers will often ask you how many points you had last night, friends might call after a game and ask if you scored, and so on. Being able to separate people who attach themselves to you because you're a top athlete from the people who share time with you for deeper reasons is important.

Ledbetter asks athletes to identify their “Inner Circle.” These are the people who have your best interest at heart, . . . they see you as a person first. Eventually your athletic skills will decline and knowing who will be there with you because of who you are is very important. This is essential if you buy into the idea of separating who you are from what you do.

Who is in your “Inner Circle?”





## Your “Board of Directors”

Brett Ledbetter, Author: *What Drives Winning*



Sue Enquist won 11 NCAA National Championships and more than 800 Softball games during her coaching career at UCLA. She created a slight twist on the “Inner Circle” idea by focusing on the other side of the coin. An athlete’s “Board of Directors” is comprised of the people gathered to help someone with “what she does” instead of “who she is.”

Although this is the opposite of a player’s “Inner Circle,” it serves the same purpose of helping an athlete separate what she does from who she is.

Your “Board” could be other athletes, alumni from your program, an Athletic Director, etc. Think of who can help you get through challenging times as an athlete. Who has been there before and has the willingness to guide you?

If you’d like help, we have many alumni and great relationships with other sports on campus. We can help you make a list. When you make your list, don’t forget to enact them. Let these people know they’re on your list and confirm they would be willing to help you when needed.

Who is on your “Board of Directors?”

