

ELEVATING YOUR GAME

COACH'S GUIDE



Becoming a
Triple-Impact Competitor

By Jim Thompson

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Preface

Whitey was a piece of work. He had been a running back for the Cincinnati Bearcats – and he LOVED football. What’s more – we soon learned that he LOVED US TOO! . . . You always felt important around him. He wanted to know if you were “making your mark” – leaving things better than how you found them. When I turned 20 years old he actually made me think about what kind of legacy I was leaving. None of this “live for the day” stuff for him – he made us want to make a difference.

Dr. Stephen Walker in the “Podium Sports Journal,” writing about his coach Fritz “Whitey” White

High school coaches have one of the most influential jobs in the world. For better or worse, they make their mark on the lives of countless young people every year.

If you played sports in high school, you probably have at least one coach who made a mark on you. Maybe you hear his voice when you face an obstacle you are not sure you can overcome. Maybe you hear her telling you, “I know you can do it!” and remember what it was like to have an adult invest in you, believe in you, and care about you as a person.

The audience for *Elevating Your Game* is high school athletes, but the book will make a much more dramatic impact in the hands of a Double-Goal Coach®, one who has as his first goal winning on the playing field, but who also works toward a second, more important goal, teaching life lessons.

Elevating Your Game provides practical tools to develop Triple-Impact Competitors – athletes who make themselves, teammates, and the game better – which in turn will help you win more and produce world-class young people. Consider the topics covered:

- Making effort a habit
- Developing a mental game

- Building leadership for everyone
- Filling others’ Emotional Tanks
- Learning how to create great team chemistry
- Honoring the game
- Setting and accomplishing goals
- Embracing mistakes to become your best
- Cultivating a teachable spirit
- Eating right
- Finding your moral courage
- Using your power to improve your school community

The *Coach’s Guide to Elevating Your Game* is packed with ideas for how to best address these topics as you guide high school athletes through the book. It contains activities, talking points, and discussion questions to engage your athletes. And it is flexible, designed to allow you to pick and choose the topics most relevant to you.

Most of these topics are best addressed during the pre-season or in the first few weeks of the season. Some, like the chapters and activities on the mental game, can be referenced throughout the season. Almost all of the topics require repetition, no matter when athletes are first introduced to them.

Elevating Your Game has the biggest impact among athletes when coaches use it with their entire team. You can purchase additional copies at www.positivecoach.org. You’ll find generous discounts for bulk orders that will make it easier to put the book into every athlete’s bag.

We hope *Elevating Your Game* brings a new dimension to your coaching. We wish you much success as you endeavor to leave your own mark on the young lives you are entrusted with.

Using Introduction: Three Ways to “Better” and

1

Exercise 1: Triple-Impact Competitor® Self-Assessment

► Why use it?

The Introduction and Exercise 1 in *Elevating Your Game* challenge athletes to think about ultimate competitors as those who: 1) make themselves better; 2) make their teammates better; and, 3) make the game better.

► How to use it?

1. Ask athletes to read the *Introduction: Three Ways to “Better”* on pages 3-6 in *Elevating Your Game*.

2. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.

- **Option 1:** Have your athletes take the Triple-Impact Competitor Self-Assessment. The process of making a self-evaluation can quickly lead into pairs, small-group, or whole team discussion about what it means to be a Triple-Impact Competitor.
- **Option 2:** Give each athlete a slip of paper and a pencil. Provide these directions: “Close your eyes, and think of the hardest worker on our team, the athlete who does everything they can to improve. Write down their initials. Next, think of the person on the team with the most encouraging team spirit, the person who makes others feel better and most raises team morale and energy. Write down their initials. Next, write down the initials of the teammate who plays with the most class. They keep their cool when officials make a bad call. They are fierce in competition but also friendly, offering to pick up an opponent they may have knocked down just seconds before. They show respect for officials, opponents, and the rules.” Then ask these questions: *What was the experience of*

writing down initials like for you? Do you want to share any of the initials you have written down? What positive things did your teammates do to earn a spot on your slip of paper? How many of you have written down more than one set of initials? Anybody have the same teammate for more than one of these descriptions? All three? Explain that becoming a Triple-Impact Competitor encompasses all three of the qualities represented by the initials they have written down. Triple-Impact Competitors make themselves, their teammates, and the game better.

3. Use Talking Points to discuss the Triple-Impact Competitor model.

- The ultimate competitor is a Triple-Impact Competitor, one who makes self better, teammates better, and the game better. It isn't enough to excel on your own, even in an individual sport. The top competitors make everyone, even their coaches and especially their teammates, better. It's not enough to just win, especially if that means stretching or breaking rules or disrespecting opponents. The greatest competitors leave a lasting, positive mark on the game they play.
- The one word to remember when you think of the greatest competitors is “better.” That's their mantra. As Jim Thompson points out in *Elevating Your Game*, “Consider the Olympic motto, ‘Citius, Altius, Fortius!’ – ‘Faster, Higher, Stronger!’ Notice, in the premier competition in the world – the Olympics – it isn't about being the fastest, highest, strongest. If you are the best in the world in your event, you still want to get better. **For the best, ‘better’ is better than ‘best.’**”
- Winning on the scoreboard isn't everything in sports or life. In virtually every competition, someone or some team loses. You won't win every time, but you can always strive to do things right. Keeping the Triple-Impact Competitor model in your mind can help you do that. Ask yourself what things

you can do to make yourself, your teammates, and the game better. Then do those things.

4. **Challenge your athletes to consider concrete ways they can make themselves, their teammates, and the game better.** Lead a brainstorming session. Then ask your athletes to make a commitment to following through and acting on some of the actions they came up with.

Using Chapter 1.1: The ELM Tree of Mastery

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► Why use it?

Chapter 1.1 is the first of four chapters that relate to the ELM Tree of Mastery. The ELM Tree has three branches. The first branch is **Effort** (discussed in Chapter 1.2), teaching athletes to give maximum effort at all times. The second branch is **Learning** (Chapter 1.3), teaching athletes to have a teachable spirit that allows them to soak up information to constantly improve. The third branch is **Mistakes** (Chapter 1.4), which teaches athletes how to quickly learn from or move past errors in order to better concentrate on the next play.

Continuing the metaphor, the ELM Tree has a big trunk to which the three branches are connected. The trunk represents Mastery. In *Elevating Your Game*, Jim Thompson talks about how athletes do better – improve performance and win more – when they have a mastery focus rather than a scoreboard focus. The mastery focus is a function of giving attention to things athletes can control – Effort, Learning, and Mistakes—as opposed to things they can't control – opponents, weather, bad calls, and luck, among other things.

► How to use it?

1. **Introduce the topic.** Start with this prompt:

During the 2000 Olympic Games, a professor of sport psychology asked an interesting question: Who wins more: athletes who have been trained to focus on the scoreboard, or athletes who were trained to focus on effort and improvement, something she called a “mastery” focus? Joan Duda, the professor, interviewed athletes and coaches, counted

medals, and came to some conclusions. *What do you think she discovered?*

Share the information about Joan Duda's study on page 9 in *Elevating Your Game*. Tell athletes that Duda discovered that those who were trained with a mastery focus won more. Then ask them to speculate why this is so. Emphasize that a mastery focus is one in which athletes concentrate on what they can control – things like effort, improvement, listening to coaches, and skill development. Duda did not find that the best forgot the scoreboard altogether. Of course, Olympians, like other athletes, care about the scoreboard. But, when the scoreboard becomes everything, athletic performance can suffer.

Then ask these questions:

- Which do you focus on **more** in practice, scoreboard or mastery?
- Which do you focus on **more** during competitions, scoreboard or mastery?
- Which do you focus on **more** during the most critical moments of a competition, scoreboard or mastery?
- Which do you think about **more** on the car ride home after a competition, scoreboard or mastery?

The advantage of committing more of your attention to mastery is that your focus is devoted to things you can control, such as your effort, proper technique, or helping out your teammates.

Concentrating too much on the scoreboard will lead you to constantly compare yourself to others. If you focus more on mastery, on the other hand, you compare yourself with your best self, constantly trying to improve. And, the byproduct is that you'll win more when you strive to be your best.

2. **Make the ELM Tree part of your team culture.** If you want athletes to buy into ELM by giving maximum effort, having a teachable spirit, and flushing mistakes quickly, then you'll need to invest time and effort into making it a part of your team culture. Consider doing some or all of the following:

- Make "Great effort!" or "Nice effort" a constant part of your language, even when the outcome might not be what you want. Reward unsuccessful effort with praise. Focus your praise on the effort, not the outcome.
- Give symbolic rewards for effort; a "Dirty Jersey" award may seem cheesy to you but it won't to the athlete who wears it. She earned it.
- Don't yell at athletes who have made mistakes. Instead, use the mistake as a teachable moment or encourage your athlete to flush the mistake and move on to the next play.

► Why use it?

Few things are more important in sports than effort and hard work. Maximum effort produces maximum results almost every time. At the same time, coaches and athletes are enamored with talent, frequently seeing it as the key to success. But, talent can be a trap. Indeed, nothing is sadder than talent without effort. Talent and effort have to be married to get the best results. Communicating this to your athletes levels the playing field. Your star athletes and third-stringers alike can benefit from knowing that being their best hinges on something they have complete control over – effort.

► How to use it?

1. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.

- **Option 1:** Hold up two signs on pieces of paper like the ones pictured below. Then, give your athletes this prompt: *Imagine that later in life you grow up to be me. You are the coach. Which would you rather have, a team with talented athletes who don't work very hard and who think they can just show up and get it done? Or, a team with less talent, a dose of humility, and athletes who always give 100 percent? Why?*



- **Option 2:** Show YouTube clips from the film *Rudy*. Two clips can be used to show the importance of effort to the success of Daniel “Rudy” Ruettiger, the 5’7”, 165 pound, learning-disabled student who succeeded in the elite classrooms and on the football fields of Notre Dame in the mid-70s.
 - “Rudy-Spring Training” shows the diminutive Rudy barely making the practice squad through sheer grit.
 - “The True Rudy Story (Part 2)” shows the real Rudy mixed with scenes from the film that tells how Rudy made it at Notre Dame on the field and in the classroom.

2. Use these talking points.

- There is nothing more important to your ultimate success than effort. Despite this, many athletes focus on assessing their own talent and often decide early on just how good they can be. They compare themselves to others and attach their sports goals to how well they measure up in the talent department. They focus on what they can’t do.
- This talent focus is a trap. Athletes mistakenly buy-in to the idea that talent is a fixed thing. You have it or you don’t. Nothing is farther from the truth. Athletic talent is not like eye color. Talent is not fixed. You can change it – with effort.
- If you make effort a habit, meaning you give your best in practice, you try hard around the clock as a 24-Hour-Athlete, and you leave it all out there in competitions, you may not become the best, but you give yourself the greatest chance to become your best. As a coach, that’s all I could ever expect or hope for.
- If everyone on the team develops an effort focus, we’ll accomplish more than we ever expected or imagined.

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3. Have your athletes read *Chapter 1.2: Effort as a Habit* in *Elevating Your Game*. Pages 11-13 have content comparing a fixed mindset with a growth mindset from Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*. You may want to read those pages aloud to your athletes and discuss these questions: *What is a fixed mindset? A growth mindset? Are there times when you have approached learning a new skill or sport with a fixed mindset? How did that turn out? How can a growth mindset help you this season?*
4. **Make an effort focus part of your team culture.** If you want athletes to give maximum effort, then you'll need to invest in it. Consider doing some or all of the following:
 - Make "Great effort!" or "Nice effort" a constant part of your language, even when the outcome might not be what you want.
 - Give symbolic rewards for effort.
 - Talk specifically about what great effort looks and sounds like. Point it out in practice and at competitions, to players who are on the bench and to your stars.
 - Have athletes write down what they can do to give more effort in their sport. Hopefully, they generate ideas for making additional efforts away from practices and games.
 - Share about your own efforts to be a better coach, such as books you have read and clinics you've attended.

► Why use it?

Successful athletes and teams set goals and develop plans to achieve them. Goal-setting is also an essential life skill. Using Exercise 2 will help your athletes perform better and be more successful throughout their lives.

► How to use it?

1. Have athletes read Exercise 2 on pages 14-16 in *Elevating Your Game*.
2. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.
 - **Option 1:** Give each athlete a sheet of paper. Tell them the paper is a gift and to do whatever they want to with it. Silently, watch them for a few minutes. Take note of what they do.

Then give them a second sheet of paper, and make this announcement in an excited fashion: "We are about to hold the greatest paper airplane making contest ever! Your goal: make the paper airplane that travels farthest. Your reward: (pick one that will really charge your athletes up). You have five minutes to make your airplane. Then we will see who has made the best plane." After the contest, ask these questions: *What did you do with the first piece of paper? The second? How were those two experiences different?*

Explain the point of the exercise this way: “Everyone has gifts. The piece of paper was a gift. Picasso might have turned that gift into a priceless piece of art. Bill Gates might have used that gift to make plans for his next big business venture. Kanye West might have written his next big hit on that sheet of paper. You have gifts and talents that you bring to practice every day. But if you don’t have any goal for what to do with those gifts, they could get wasted. Setting specific goals, like we did with the second piece of paper, gave all of us a focus and produced better results. Goal-setting, deciding how you’ll use your gifts, is essential to maximizing what you’ll get out of them. As Jim Thompson says, ‘Successful people set goals and work hard to achieve them. Unsuccessful people don’t.’ Today we are going to set some goals.”

- **Option 2: Use the following chart to set individual and team goals.** Ask athletes to complete the first two columns in the “Individual Goals” chart and to share them with a partner. (**Note:** Encourage them to create measurable goals. If a goal cannot be measured, it is hard to determine if it has been achieved.) Circulate and examine goals during the discussion or collect the charts and have one-on-one discussions about them with each of your athletes. Then ask athletes to complete the first two columns of the “Team Goals” chart. Follow up with a whole team discussion about team goals. Set your team goals, and revisit them often as the season unfolds.

SETTING INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM GOALS

Individual Goals

Goals	Plan for Achieving Goals	Adjustments

Team Goals

Goals	Plan for Achieving Goals	Adjustments

► Why use it?

Using *Chapter 1.3: Cultivating a Teachable Spirit* will serve you well by helping athletes see the benefits of being coachable.

► How to use it?

1. Ask your athletes to read *Chapter 1.3: Cultivating a Teachable Spirit in Elevating Your Game*.

2. Introduce the topic. Bring three things: a bowl of water, a sponge, and a rock. Ask athletes to watch as you dip the sponge into the bowl. Take the sponge out and squeeze the water back into the bowl. Then put the rock into the bowl. Pull it out and ask the following questions: *What is the difference between a sponge and a rock? Now, a harder question: how are some athletes like sponges and others like rocks?*

Expect athletes to struggle a bit with this second question. Then explain that some athletes show up to practice eager and ready to learn. They soak up new knowledge from their coaches and teammates. They know that they can learn from just about anybody, anywhere, if they listen carefully enough. Other athletes are so hard, nothing can penetrate. They come to practice thinking they already know it all. They challenge coaches and others instead of listening to them. Their hardness makes them less able to learn, and, unlike sponges, they don't grow. (**Note:** Consider using one of the bathtub sponges that looks like a pill before being dropped in the water and like an animal after exposed to water. This makes a nice connection to the notion of growth.) Ask: *What are things we can all do to be more like sponges and less like rocks?*

3. Use these discussion questions to debrief Chapter 1.3.

- Benjamin Barber's quote opens the chapter. Barber says, "I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and failures, those who make it or those who don't. I divide the world into learners and non-learners." *What does Barber mean? Why does he divide the world the way he does? Are you a learner all of the time, or are there times when you are a non-learner? What's the difference between those times?*
- *How can you be more like a sponge?*
- Fools don't care what others think. They aren't afraid of looking stupid. *Why are fools free? How can the "freedom of the fool" help you in sports?*
- *What does WAG stand for? What specific actions can you take in practice this week to implement the WAG tool?*

4. Use the talking points below to elaborate on having a Teachable Spirit.

- Having a "Teachable Spirit" is the key to becoming a Triple-Impact Competitor. A Triple-Impact Competitor is a sponge.
- A sponge absorbs all of the liquid around it. We want you to develop a Teachable Spirit. We want you to always be looking to learn something new that can make you a better player and us a better team.
- George Leonard says, "To be a learner, you've got to be willing to be a fool." He's right. There are very few things worth learning that don't force the learner through an ugly phase. Has fear of looking stupid ever kept you from learning something new? Likely it has. Remember, the fool has freedom. The fool doesn't care what others think. The fool turns off the inner critic. The fool makes mistakes and looks funny in the process. The fool is free. We need to learn to play the fool from time to time if we are going to be our best.

Using Exercise 3: Sports Nutrition Quiz

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- The person with a Teachable Spirit is curious. We want you to be curious. If you don't know something, WAG your way through it.
 - 1) **Watch** someone who knows how to do it.
 - 2) **Ask** someone to teach you or show you how.
 - 3) **Get** coaching. Ask someone to be your coach as you try to learn it.
- 5. **Ask athletes to pair up and discuss these questions:** *What is one thing you want to learn to do better this week? What are some things you can do that will help you learn?*
- 6. **Make having a teachable spirit part of your team culture.** If you want athletes to buy into having a teachable spirit you'll need to make a commitment to reinforcing the idea as the season unfolds. Consider doing some or all of the following:
 - Catch athletes listening and soaking up new information and give verbal rewards for it. For example, at the end of practice spotlight athletes who learned most or who had the best attitude about learning.
 - Give awards for "Most Teachable Spirit" several times (perhaps, even weekly). Make sure all of your athletes know that having a Teachable Spirit is tied to being like a sponge: listening to others and soaking up what they can teach us.

► Why use it?

Nutrition is critical to athletic performance, but even athletes who are concerned with nutrition often have misconceptions about it, and few have detailed knowledge about how to eat for their sport. Plus, good nutrition is important to a healthy lifestyle. With current rates of obesity, it is possible today's generation might be the first in a long time to live shorter lives than the one preceding it. High school coaches can do something about that.

► How to use it?

1. **Introduce the topic.** Introduce the topic of nutrition using the short, engaging Sports Nutrition Quiz on page 21 of *Elevating Your Game*. Have athletes complete it before or during practice.
2. **Lead a discussion of the quiz results.** Discuss each of the eight quiz questions. As you do, review the information on pages 22-24 of *Elevating Your Game* and reiterate the notion of being a "24-hour athlete." Pay close attention to what your athletes are saying about their own nutrition so you know what things to reinforce as the season unfolds.
3. **Have athletes record and turn in a week-long food journal.** This attention to detail could give you and your athletes just the information you need to turn routine performances into great ones. Use Exercise 3 as a starting point for discussing nutritional advice for your sport. Regularly provide additional articles or your own handouts with sport-specific nutrition tips to the athletes.
4. **Model good nutrition.** Actions speak louder than words.

Using Chapter 1.4: Embracing Mistakes to Become Your Best and Exercise 4: Developing a Mistake Ritual

7

► Why use it?

Sports are filled with mistakes. Chapter 1.4 and Exercise 4 in *Elevating Your Game* acknowledge that fact. But they go further by teaching athletes how to best deal with mistakes – by learning from them, or quickly moving past them to make the next play. Providing athletes with concrete guidance and strategies for dealing with mistakes will make them more resilient as athletes and people.

► How to use it?

1. Have athletes read Chapter 1.4 on pages 25-29 in *Elevating Your Game*.
2. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.

- **Option 1:** Blindfold one of your best athletes. Ask him to attempt to make a basket or goal while blindfolded (or do something better suited to your sport). Ask the team to shout out specific feedback to help their teammate. Give the team a time limit, and reward them if the blindfolded athlete achieves his goal. Afterward, ask these questions of the blindfolded athlete: *Did you make all of the shots you took? How did you learn to improve your performance? Did your missed shots/mistakes improve your performance? Why?*

Ask the team these questions: *Can mistakes actually be helpful to an athlete? How? Have you ever seen mistakes bring down an athlete and make them play worse? Why? How can we use mistakes to improve our athletic performance?*

Make these points: The blindfolded athlete got closer to the target with almost every shot. Each miss (mistake), and the feedback that accompanied it, actually improved performance. Sometimes we see mistakes as our enemy. In fact, if you think about it, they may actually be our best friend. We often learn the most from our mistakes. As a team we need to rethink how we perceive mistakes.

- **Option 2:** Ask athletes these questions: *What is your favorite video game? How long have you been playing the game? Are you any good at it? Did you make any mistakes when you first started playing the game? Do you still make mistakes? How do mistakes help you better play the game? Do you deal with mistakes in sports the same way you do when you play video games, or do you let mistakes bring you down? How can we use mistakes to improve our athletic performance?* The point here is that many young people tolerate mistakes in a gaming environment much better than they do in the classroom or in the athletic environment. With video games, they know that each mistake helps them figure out how to do things better as they move to the next level. The same holds true in sports, if they think about mistakes differently.

3. Use the talking points below to talk about mistakes.

- Sports are filled with mistakes. That said, figuring out how to best deal with them is one of the most important things an athlete and person can learn.
- Triple-Impact Competitors always want to learn and get better. But fear of mistakes gets in the way of learning new things.
- You can never be your best if you fear making mistakes. If you are afraid of making a mistake, you are going to play tentatively, and tentative players usually get beat.

- Bouncing back from mistakes takes mental toughness. Many people let mistakes paralyze them, and they are not able to respond to the next situation. We want to be a team that responds aggressively after a mistake.
- We want you to play aggressively, not tentatively. So we want you to flush mistakes as quickly as you can. When you make a mistake, flush it and get ready for the next play. Don't beat yourself up about the last play. Get ready for the next one.
- We also want you to help your teammates flush mistakes. After teammates make a mistake, encourage them to flush it and get ready for the next play.
- We're going to have ups and downs this season. When things go wrong, many teams get down on themselves, and it's hard to play your best when you are down. So, let's commit to flushing mistakes and playing as hard as we can on the next play.

4. Have athletes complete *Exercise 4: Developing a Mistake Ritual*.

Afterwards, have athletes share what they decided with the team. Ask yourself and possibly the team if there is a team mistake ritual you can use or if it is better to have individual ones or both.

5. Make embracing mistakes a part of your team culture. If you want athletes to better deal with mistakes, consider doing some or all of the following:

- Encourage the whole team to help others to quickly move past mistakes. Knowing your teammates support you even when you've blown it helps athletes overcome the fear of making mistakes and will promote the aggressive play that wins.

- Don't yell at athletes who have made mistakes. Don't roll your eyes, act disgusted, or make fun when mistakes are made. Instead, use mistakes to provide teachable moments or actively encourage athletes to flush the mistake and move on to the next play.
- Use a mistake ritual when you make a mistake. Forgot your clipboard? Flush it.

Using Chapter 1.5: Getting a Mental Edge: Preparing to Compete, Chapter 1.6: Getting a Mental Edge: During the Game and Exercise 5: Honing Your Mental Game

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► **Why use it?**

The chapters and exercises on the mental game occupy a major chunk of *Elevating Your Game*. That's because high school athletes who may have spent thousands of hours drilling a skill or growing a muscle may have spent zero time working on their mental game. That's too bad. Young athletes can't be at their best if they don't hone their mental game. And a coach who takes the time to formally teach the skills in the mental game section of *Elevating Your Game* will unquestionably improve their athlete's performances.

► **How to use it?**

1. Introduce the mental game using this activity. Have all your athletes stand up. Tell them that Yogi Berra, a Hall of Fame catcher for the New York Yankees, once said, "Ninety percent of the game is half mental." While a bit confusing, Berra's statement raises an interesting question. What percent of our sport is mental? Tell them that you are going to state a series of percentages. Tell them to sit down when you've stated the percentage they most agree with. Start with "Less than 10% of our sport is mental." Then move to 20, 30, 40, 50 percent and so on until all of the athletes are seated. When Gary Mack, the author of *Mind Gym*, a great book on the mental game, does this with professional athletes, at least half of the athletes are standing at 50 percent. Afterward, discuss this question: *How important is the mental game to athletic performance.* Reinforce the points Jim Thompson makes in *Elevating Your Game*. The mental game is extremely important. Most high school athletes have spent little time developing a mental game. The athletes who have strong mental games give themselves a much better chance to win.

- 2. Ask athletes to read Chapters 1.5 and 1.6.** That may sound like too much reading, but *Elevating Your Game* was written in bite-size chunks for a reason. This is just 10 pages that most athletes could finish in 30 minutes or less.
- 3. Have athletes complete Exercise 5: *Honing Your Mental Game* and discuss their responses.**
- 4. Make working on the mental game a part of what you do as a team.** Integrate discussions of some or all of the tools dealt with in Chapters 1.5 and 1.6 throughout the season. Below are some discussion questions/ideas for dealing with each of the mental game tools in Chapters 1.5 and 1.6. Pick and choose as you see fit.

Mental Rehearsal

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the "Mental Rehearsal" section on pages 32-33 of *Elevating Your Game*. Nolan Ryan was one of the most intimidating pitchers to ever play professional baseball. Ryan threw seven no-hitters, three more than any other pitcher has ever thrown. One interesting thing about Ryan is that he pitched each game in his mind's eye before the game even started. *How did he do that? What is mental rehearsal? Why do you think it is so effective? What are some tips to keep in mind when you do mental rehearsal? How can you integrate mental rehearsal into your game?*
- Remind athletes that mental rehearsal is a form of visualization. Visualization is something we do all of the time. Ask them to think about where their mind was during the last period of the school day. See. Visualizing comes naturally. The key is to become an intentional visualizer, like Nolan Ryan.
- You can demystify a technique like mental rehearsal by taking the time to have the entire team do it together. Prepare

a script that describes specific things you want your athletes to do. The script could relate to a competition: "Imagine you are walking onto the field today. It is the opposing team's field, but you feel supremely confident. It's the same size as the one you practice on every day. You feel energized. Excited. This is what you've practiced for. You warm-up with purpose. You are vocal and positive with your teammates, pumping each one up..." The script could also relate to a specific skill: "You are at the service line. You feel strong and confident. You are totally in the zone, hitting serves wherever you want. There, into the corner. Now, at the body. Your service motion is perfect. You extend your arm as you toss the ball, your hand and fingers stretched to the sky..." Find a location where your athletes can concentrate as you read the script. Ask them to lie down or sit back and close their eyes. Read the script while your athletes soak it in.

- Encourage athletes to visualize on their own. Mental rehearsal is something they can do periodically throughout the day, at a competition between matches, or, right in the middle of a competition. See it. Do it.
- Write up and distribute a specific visualization task for each of your athletes that they can use right before they fall asleep at night or whenever they find it most helpful.

Catastrophization

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the "Catastrophization" section on pages 33-34 of *Elevating Your Game*. *What is catastrophization? How can catastrophization be used in visualization? How can thinking of a catastrophe better prepare you for a competition?*
- Catastrophization is a great mental game technique to introduce right before a competition. Give your athletes an

index card. Have them write down the worst thing that could happen in the upcoming competition. Have them place the cards in a pile. Then lead them through the visualization process, using language similar to the following: "On your card you've written down the worst thing that could happen tomorrow. That's okay. Bad things happen in sports and life. You can't always control events, but you can control how you respond to them. You be in control. Don't let the event control you. See yourself in the moment the bad thing happens. See yourself remaining calm, confident, and ready to make the next play. You quickly flush the negative stuff. Then, you perform the next best action. You turn up your energy level, help out a teammate, or make a great play. You are on the other side of it now, performing well. You made it through a rough patch. Your persistence and resilience paid off."

Internal and External Cameras

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the "Internal and External Cameras" section on page 34 of *Elevating Your Game*. *What is the difference between the Internal Camera and the External Camera? Why is it helpful to use both when you visualize?*
- Take your athletes through a guided visualization of a specific technique to teach them the difference between the two perspectives.
- Videotape your athletes using proper technique. Have them use the video to help them better visualize when using the two different cameras. Internal Camera question: *What did it feel like to use proper technique?* External Camera question: *What does it look like when you use proper technique?*

Preparing for Off-Days

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the “Preparing for Off-Days” section on pages 34-35 of *Elevating Your Game*. *Have you ever had the experience in sports where everything you did turned out well? You were in what sport psychologists call “the zone.” By contrast, have you ever had a truly awful off-day? Sure, we all have. In Elevating Your Game, Jim Thompson deals with a mental game technique designed for off-days. What does he recommend? Do you really need a back-up plan for off-days, or should you just try to play through the struggles? Do you already use a back-up plan? Does it help?*
- Hand out an index card to each athlete. Have them write the letters A, B, and C along the left column of the index card. Then, have them describe their “A” game as well as two back up plans: the “B” plan and the “C” plan. Have athletes partner to discuss their plans. Follow-up individually with players to make sure their plans are sound and that they match their role on the team.

Reframing to Increase Resilience

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the “Reframing to Increase Resilience” section on pages 36-37 of *Elevating Your Game*. *What does “reframing” mean? How do filmmakers use reframing to better tell a story? How did Derek Fisher of the Los Angeles Lakers use reframing to help his team win a championship? What is the three-step process used in reframing? Is there anything you are struggling with right now, in sports or life, that you could reframe? Is there anything you are going through right now as a team that would be helped by the reframing process?*

- Share an optical illusion like the one showing a young couple/old couple at this link: http://www.coolopticalillusions.com/crazy/crazy_optical_illusion_painting.htm. Use it to launch a discussion about perspective and reframing. You might say something like this: “When things aren’t going well, sometimes we just need to reframe and get a different perspective. There are always multiple perspectives on an event or situation, just like there are two ways to see the optical illusion. Your ultimate success hinges on developing healthy and positive ways of looking at negative events. Reframing can help you do that.”

Control Your Emotions with a Self-Control Routine

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the “Control Your Emotions with a Self-Control Routine” section on page 38 of *Elevating Your Game*. *What is a self-control routine? Why do you need one? What are some different ideas for developing a self-control routine for our sport?*
- Have athletes write down and commit to use a self-control routine.
- Be very careful with this one, but, if you know your athletes well, you also know what pushes their buttons. Push them in practice. Make bad calls during a scrimmage. Set up the rules of a drill to the detriment of one athlete or one team. Afterward, let your athletes know what you’ve done and why you’ve done it. Explain that it isn’t enough just to have a self-control routine. You also have to practice using it, just like you practice a play or a specific technique.

Transformational Self-Talk

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the “Transformational Self-Talk” section on pages 38-39 of *Elevating Your Game*. Jim Thompson says everyone engages in self-talk, and that we often focus on the negatives, especially when we play sports. *How is your self-talk? Is it mostly positive or negative? If you want to change your self-talk, you can use a mental game technique called “Transformational Self-Talk.” What are the three steps involved with that technique? How can you counteract negative self-talk?*
- Give your athletes an opportunity to practice Transformational Self-Talk. Present some worst-case-scenarios that fit your sport. For example, if you are a basketball coach, you might provide these scenarios and the resulting self-talk:
1) You decide to drive to the left and the ball gets stolen. “That happens every time! I am so worthless!”
2) You’ve just missed your third shot in a row. “It just isn’t my day!”
3) Coach assigns you to play defense on the other team’s best player. He just drove by you like a statue in the park. “I lost focus again. Why can’t I keep my head in the game?”

Prevent Choking with the 3 B’s

- Use these discussion questions to debrief the “Prevent Choking with the 3 B’s” section on pages 39-40 of *Elevating Your Game*. *How does Jim Thompson define choking? Under that definition, have you ever choked? What are the 3 B’s? If you’ve faced a high-pressure situation, it’s likely you have. Thompson suggests using the 3 B’s to avoid choking.*
- Practice pressure. Practice the 3 B’s. Set the clock to 30 seconds. Make it match point. Play an overtime. Pipe in crowd noise. Do whatever you can to simulate pressure for your sport, and ask athletes to practice using the 3 B’s in the midst of that pressure.

Using Chapter 1.7 Non-Attachment: Separating Identity from Performance

9

► Why use it?

In Chapter 1.7 of *Elevating Your Game*, Jim Thompson deals with an idea designed to de-stress high school athletics and improve performance: non-attachment. If you want your athletes to perform their best when it matters most, you won’t want to skip this chapter.

Thompson explains non-attachment this way, “In pressure moments, competitors can be helped by a concept called ‘non-attachment.’ Non-attachment is the ability to detach oneself from the outcome of a performance. Top performing athletes understand the result of an athletic contest does not define them as a person. When athletes define themselves by results, the desire to succeed can produce a hyped-up emotional state that robs them of their best effort.”

How can athletes avoid wanting to win so much that they end up losing? Non-attachment.

► How to use it?

1. **Share the story on page 43 of *Elevating Your Game*.** The story is quoted below. It was adapted from *Thinking Body, Dancing Mind* by Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch. Feel free to read it or to tell it with your own embellishments.

A farmer’s son was distraught when he left the gate open and the family’s only horse escaped. “This is the worst thing that could happen,” he told his father, who replied, “How do you know that?” The next day, their horse returned leading a herd of wild horses. The son said, “This is the best thing that could happen.” Father: “How do you know that?” When the son broke his

arm trying to tame one of the wild horses, he said, “This is the worst thing that could happen.” Father again: “How do you know that?” Shortly thereafter, military recruiters came to enlist all the young men in the area. They don’t take the injured son, who exulted, “This is the best thing that could happen.” I think you know what the father said.

2. Use these questions and comments to debrief the story. *What was the problem with the son’s perspective? What perspective did his father have that the son needed to learn? How does this lesson relate to you as a person? As an athlete?* Explain that like the little boy, athletes and coaches are hyper-focused on outcomes. They have a hard time seeing the big picture. And, sometimes they even define themselves by outcomes. If they lose, they are losers. If they win big, they develop a big head, even if the competition isn’t very good. In *Elevating Your Game*, Jim Thompson deals with an idea that can help athletes and coaches maintain a healthier perspective and see the big picture. He calls it non-attachment.

3. Share the talking points below on non-attachment.

- It is hard for athletes not to have short-term, in-the-moment thinking. In every sport there is a clock or scoreboard constantly giving feedback on what has just happened. And, we respond in the moment: “Oh no! We are down 21-0. This game is over.” “I just won the first set 6-1. This match is going to be a cakewalk.” “I got off to a bad start. I’ll never catch up.” Having this narrow, in-the-moment view can tie us up in knots.
- Have you ever failed in a big moment in a competition? You missed a shot you always make; your feet moved in slow motion just when you needed a burst of speed; you made a wrong decision that with less pressure you would never

make. If this hasn’t happened to you, have you watched it? Sure, we’ve all seen it, even in the pros. So, how can you avoid it?

- Here’s a big term from *Elevating Your Game* that can help. Non-attachment. What does that term mean?
 1. When the pressure builds, you should detach or disconnect yourself from the outcome. As you detach, focus on the things you have control over, like doing things the right way, giving maximum effort, supporting teammates, or listening carefully to your coach. Detachment should lead to calm and focus. (**Note:** You might create a sign with “You” at the top and “Outcome” at the bottom. Split the two as you talk about non-attachment.)
 2. Recognize that you are not defined by your wins and losses. You are way more than that. When you begin to believe your identity is not dependent on your performance you begin to free yourself from the pressure to succeed. That leads to self-confidence and makes it more likely you will succeed.
 3. Get the big picture. Know that for every loss, there is a win waiting around the corner. Like a filmmaker, pan back. Go from a close-up (you in that moment wishing you wouldn’t lose) to a wide-angle shot (the rest of the contest - no matter how it turns out - you and school, with friends, family, in your community, you and your future). When you see the big picture, and all that life has to offer, in sports and out, all the good and the bad, let the pressure go. And just do your best, win or lose. Because, in the end, if you do your best when it matters most and you still lose, then you can hold your chin high, shake a few hands, and walk off proud of yourself. That’s all anyone can do.

► Why use it?

This chapter is not conventional leadership thinking. Jim Thompson says that unleashing the full potential of your team depends on the involvement of all of your athletes as leaders and followers. Read it, and decide whether you want a team in which everyone looks for ways to move the team ahead by playing leadership roles.

For example, Thompson asserts that the “genius with a thousand helpers” model of leadership doesn’t work in high school athletics (or in very many other places in life, for that matter). When high school athletes feel empowered, and know that their voice and actions matter, they recognize that they can impact – yes, even lead – their team in important ways. As a coach, you have the unique opportunity to teach young people, most of whom spend their lives passively following directions, how to lead.

(**Note:** If you already have an existing captain or mentor program that works well, keep doing it. Beyond that, you can still promote the growth of leadership for every single athlete. That’s the goal of this chapter and the activities described below.)

► How to use it?

1. Introduce the topic using this activity. Put your athletes into groups of three or four. Give each group an index card, a pen, and a highlighter. Ask this question: *What does leadership look and sound like?* Ask each group to brainstorm answers. Bullet points and sentence fragments are okay. The goal is to generate as many ideas as possible. Have each group share their responses. Then give each group

a highlighter. Tell them to highlight any of the ideas that could be carried out by any member of the team, from coach to least experienced member of the team. Discuss these questions: *What did you discover about leadership from this activity? Is leadership something that only a few members of our team can demonstrate? Will we be stronger or weaker as a team with more leaders? What if everyone agreed to lead in all of the ways you identified? As you think about leadership, what thoughts do you have about following? When does it make more sense to follow rather than lead?*

2. Use the talking points below.

- Leadership is not tied solely to a title such as coach or captain. Leadership is open to anyone who is emotionally committed to the team’s success. It is not limited to heroic, charismatic, strong, and/or brilliant individuals who “look like a leader.”
- Leadership isn’t so much “yell and tell” as it is leading by acting with energy and passion to help the team. In fact, the “yell and tell” approach can shut others down and kill their potential as leaders.
- What can you do to lead? Arrive early to practice. Set the pace during conditioning drills. Go all-out no matter what the score. Learn your teammates’ names and use them when you greet them in practice. Invite a teammate to have lunch with you and your friends. Notice when teammates are down and do what you can to pick them up. Everyone can lead.
- Leadership is also knowing when to follow. When you follow, follow with a commitment that helps others lead. That’s being a dynamic follower. Dynamic followers don’t publicly challenge their coach. They wait for a private moment to discuss issues they are concerned with. Dynamic followers never put down or make fun of teammates who have been

given a formal leadership role. They do everything they can to make it easier for others to lead.

- Leadership is enhanced by emotional commitment. Emotionally committed athletes don't just go through the motions. They are committed to team success heart and soul and relentlessly look for ways to make their teammates better.
- Leadership is the release of energy. How can you release energy on your team? Encourage role players or underclassmen with notes or words of encouragement. Tell them the potential you see in them. Play hard all of the time. Do the dirty work. Serve others as opposed to expecting to be served. Cheer and encourage your teammates. Be relentlessly positive. Don't belittle or demean your teammates. Be upbeat and energetic.

3. Get commitments to lead. Discuss this question: *What is one thing we've talked about today that you can do to lead during the next week or so? What commitment to leadership will you make?* Decide, and tell a teammate or coach what you've committed to do.

4. Have athletes read *Chapter 2.1: Leadership for Everyone in Elevating Your Game*. Use the questions below to debrief the chapter.

- Cal Rugby Coach Jack Clark requires everyone on his team to "possess some leadership." *What does he mean by this? Do you think this contributed to his amazing success as a college coach? Why or why not?*
- *What does Thompson mean when he says "Leadership is a team sport"?*
- *Do you agree that high-performing teams require everyone to lead?*
- *Do you agree that anyone who is "emotionally committed" to the team's success can be a leader? Why or why not?*

- *What are some ways anyone on our team can play a leadership role?*
- *What does it mean to be a "dynamic follower"? How do dynamic followers help a team?*
- Thompson asserts: "Yell-and-tell shuts people down and kills their leadership potential." *Do you agree? Is there a time when yell-and-tell is the right thing to do? When is it not helpful?*
- John Gardner said, "Leadership is the release of energy." *Have you ever experienced a leader who helped released your energy? What did he or she do? How did you respond?*

Using Chapter 2.2: Filling Emotional Tanks and Exercise 6: Creating an E-Tank Action Plan

11

► Why use it?

Everyone has an Emotional Tank. When it is full, people perform better – at work, in relationships, and in sports. Unfortunately, many of us are natural tank drainers. This can especially be true of high school athletes. This is too bad because filling – rather than draining – E-Tanks will improve team cohesion, help teams win more, and make going to practices and games a lot more fun.

► How to use it?

1. Have athletes read *Chapter 2.2: Filling Emotional Tanks in Elevating Your Game* before practice.

2. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.

- **Option 1:** One great way to introduce this topic is with a visual demonstration. One tennis coach pokes a hole in a new tennis ball and drops it together with a new ball with no hole in it. A soccer coach asks a player to dribble with a ball full of air while another dribbles with a flat ball. A basketball coach tosses up a full ball and an empty one. See the connection among these exercises? People are like full and deflated balls. They do better when their Emotional Tank is full. This is a dramatic – and very visual – way to introduce this idea.
- **Option 2:** Bring a bag of balloons to practice (the bigger and more colorful the balloons, the better). Give one to each athlete, and have them blow it up and play with it. Then ask them to pop the balloon. (This may sound geeky, but try it. Even high school athletes love to play with balloons.) Gather your team, and hold up one of the broken

balloons and a full one. Say something like this: “Balloons do some very cool things when they are full. You can play catch with them. You can bounce them around and chase them. You can stuff them in your sleeves and make your biceps look huge. You can give them away and make children happy, or, dress up a room for a celebration. When balloons get really full, they can, given the right amount of pressure, be popped in order to scare a friend or family member. That’s fun. When full, if you don’t tie them off, you can let them go and be totally entertained and surprised by what they do next. Full balloons are awesome. But, deflated or damaged balloons are different. When a balloon is deflated, it is just a piece of colored plastic – not very interesting at all. And popped balloons are kind of ugly. We just throw them away. And an unfilled balloon is the very picture of unrealized potential. People are a little like balloons. We each have an Emotional Tank. When our Emotional Tank is full we perform at much higher levels than when it is empty.”

3. Use these talking points.

- Triple-Impact Competitors think beyond themselves. They look for ways to make teammates better. A big way to make people better is to fill their Emotional Tanks, or E-Tanks.
- An E-Tank is like the gas tank in a car. You can’t drive very far with an empty tank, and you can’t play your best with an empty E-Tank. If we have a team of players who fill each other’s E-Tanks, we’ll play better than if we drain each other’s tanks. (**Note:** Consider telling a story about a time when your E-Tank was drained or filled and encouraging athletes to share similar stories. It is amazing how a word or gesture from another can fill or drain our E-Tanks and affect performance.)
- Researchers observed players during the 2008-2009 NBA season and counted how many times players touched (think

non-verbal tanking filling) – high-fives, fist or chest bumps, slaps on the back. Was there a relationship between positive touches and performance? You bet. Teams that touched more were more likely to share the ball and play together better. And, significantly, they won more. This dynamic was also observed in the 2011 NBA Finals when the *Wall Street Journal* counted 250 slaps, hugs, taps and bumps for the Dallas Mavericks to just 134 for the Miami Heat in the first three games of the series. Dallas won in six games.

- How can our team fill each other's E-Tanks? Ask athletes to find a partner and talk about how to fill E-Tanks. Then ask: *What ideas did you come up with for filling the E-Tanks of your teammates?* After a brief discussion, point out the chart on pages 50-51 of *Elevating Your Game* with some great ideas about how to fill E-Tanks. Examples include:
 - Using names
 - Using coming and going greetings
 - Using specific praise
 - Expressing appreciation
 - Offering help
 - Check-ins
 - Watching out for younger players
 - Asking and listening
 - Reminding others of Mistake Rituals
 - Non-verbal actions, such as fist bumps, hand slaps
- 4. Ask athletes to complete *Exercise 6: Creating an E-Tank Action Plan*. They can do this at home or at practice.

► Why use it?

In Chapter 2.3 Jim Thompson develops an idea critical to your team's success: Double-Vision. Athletes face two choices when responding to the ups and downs of sports. Choice 1: Look in the mirror and take responsibility for their own actions when things don't go well, or look through the window and blame others, to make excuses. Choice 2: Look through the window and give teammates credit and praise for a job well done, or look in the mirror and take credit themselves. Using the window and the mirror at the right time is called Double-Vision. If every athlete on your team knows how to take responsibility when they mess up and give credit when others help the team succeed, your team will develop incredible chemistry.

► How to use it?

1. Have your athletes read *Chapter 2.3: Developing Double-Vision*.
2. **Introduce the topic.** Bring in a window and a mirror. (Finding a hand mirror is pretty easy. Finding something transparent is a little harder. You can always make a small window frame out of construction paper.) Gather your team, and ask one of your athletes to come forward. Give them the window and ask them to look through it at their teammates and to tell you what they see. Then give them the mirror and ask them what they see. Tell your team that in order to have great team chemistry each of them will need to learn when and how to use a window and a mirror. Teach two hand signals, one for mirror (holding your flat hand in front of your face) and one for window (making a hard C with one hand, again, up to your face) These are figurative windows and mirrors, not literal ones, but they are hugely important. Ask: *How can you use a window and a mirror to improve team chemistry and help us win more?*

3. Use these talking points.

- If you want to be a leader, every time something happens to our team, you have a choice of looking through a window or a mirror. You need Double-Vision.
- When you look into a mirror, you see yourself. When you look into a window, you see what is going on around you. You see what is happening to your teammates.
- When something goes right, a leader looks through a window and gives credit to those around him. When something goes wrong, a leader looks into a mirror and takes responsibility for his part in what went wrong.
- Most of the time a leader looks through a window because he or she is thinking about helping the team, and you can't do that if you are just thinking about yourself. If you get replaced in a game, think about how you can help your replacement. You can't do that if you are looking in the mirror, feeling sorry for yourself. If you are part of a great play, look through the window and congratulate all your teammates who helped make the play work.
- But there are times when you as a leader need to look in the mirror. When something goes wrong, a leader doesn't blame others. He or she looks in the mirror and takes responsibility. It's great to see players point to themselves to let teammates know they made a mistake.
- One thing that can blur Double-Vision is competition within the team. In team sports, you cooperate with your teammates to beat your opponents, but you also compete with your teammates for playing time, different positions, or ladder spots. It takes maturity to balance cooperation with competition. You make yourself better by making your teammates better. You make your teammates better by making yourself better. The key is to concentrate on the word better.

- When you watch sports on TV, look for ways the pros employ Double-Vision. Do they do it well or poorly?
- There's an old saying: "It's amazing how much we can accomplish if it doesn't matter who gets the credit." Let's focus on being leaders and get the window and mirror right.

3. Test your athletes on the use of window and mirror. For each of the scenarios below ask this question. *Is it window time or mirror time?* These scenarios and their explanations are all on pages 54 and 55 in *Elevating Your Game*.

- Everyone is down after a tough loss. You played poorly, but others did worse. (Mirror)
- You excelled in a big win. (Window)
- Coach subs you out in an important game. (Window)
- Your team is on a losing streak. (Mirror)
- Your team is on a winning streak. (Window)
- You have negative feelings toward someone on the team. (Mirror)
- You have something to share with another player that could help them play better. (Window)

4. Make "window time" and "mirror time" a part of your team culture. Meet after practices and games and ask players to share positives about others during "window time" and admit faults or failings during "mirror time."

Exercise 7: Team Culture Survey

► Why use it?

Teams with great chemistry win more – and they have more fun. But, more importantly for young people, having a place to learn how to get along and pull together toward a common goal is incredibly important. As a coach trying to make a lifetime difference, imagine if your athletes applied what they learned about creating great team chemistry later in life. Imagine if you helped them adopt values based on commitment, open communication, pursuing a common goal, and constructively dealing with conflict. Would they have stronger families? More productive work environments? Better functioning communities? You bet.

► How to use it?

1. **Introduce the topic with a brainstorm on the qualities of great team chemistry.** Give each of your athletes several post-its. Draw a box with the label “Qualities of Great Team Chemistry” on poster paper or a white-board. Ask athletes to write down three qualities they think are most important to great team chemistry on their post-its. Then ask them to put the post-its in the box. Discuss the results. Then reveal Jeff Janssen’s seven qualities: common goal, commitment, complementary roles, communication, constructive conflict, cohesion, and credible coaching. Link the original brainstorm to these seven by showing how most of the post-its are just another way of stating Janssen’s list. Ask pairs of athletes to read about each of the seven qualities on pages 58-59 of *Elevating Your Game* and to share what each of the seven qualities would concretely look and sound like on the team. If you have time, ask the pairs or groups to create short skits that demonstrate how to and how not to adhere to each of the seven qualities.

2. Ask athletes to read Chapter 2.4 in *Elevating Your Game*.

3. **Ask your team to complete *Exercise 7: Team Culture Survey*.** In the debrief you might ask athletes to share their ratings of the seven qualities on a white board or poster paper. That will give the entire team a good idea of the team’s strengths and weaknesses and help guide the commitment phase. Ask athletes to share one of the actions they recorded in the exercise aloud. That will secure stronger commitments and help the team bond.

**Using Chapter 3.1 Preparing for Your “Mallory Moment,”
Chapter 3.2 The ROOTS of Honoring the Game and
Exercise 8: Developing Honoring the Game Routines**

14

► **Why use it?**

Helping young people understand the importance of Honoring the Game is one of the most important privileges given a high school coach. Let’s face it. Sports challenge us. Officials make bad calls. Opponents bend the rules right in front of us. Opposing teams’ fans goad us from the sidelines. And the competitive juices that pulse through our veins sometimes make us a little crazy. What better environment to teach your athletes about ROOTS: respect for the Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates, and Self? The challenges of sports provide a perfect character-building arena. In fact, think about it: how could you design a better place to learn fair-play, calm under fire, honesty, or respect than high school sports? Take advantage of the opportunity.

► **How to use it?**

1. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.

- **Option 1:** Read *Chapter 3.1: Preparing for Your “Mallory Moment”* aloud to your team. Better yet, have each of them read a paragraph or two aloud. You can also show them a clip of the story from YouTube. There are several versions posted there. Afterwards, discuss these questions: Jim Thompson says that if you compete long enough you will have your own opportunity to elevate the game, your own Mallory Moment, even though it won’t look exactly like her situation. He asks, “*Will you be ready for your Mallory Moment?*” *How do you respond to that challenge? Have you already had a moment where you elevated the game? What happened and what did you do? Have you seen other athletes elevate the game with an act of sportsmanship? What happened and what did they do?*

Why do you think ESPN voted this the top sports moment of the year? Why are acts like this so important in sports? What can we do this season to exhibit classy behavior that Honors the Game?

- **Option 2:** Share an Honoring the Game story from your own coaching experience or from the news to demonstrate how you want your team to compete with class. For example, you may want to share how pitcher Armando Galarraga dealt with having an umpire blow a call that cost him a perfect game in 2010 when he pitched for the Detroit Tigers that made national news.

2. Use these talking points.

- Triple-Impact Competitors compete by a code of Honoring the Game to actually make the game better. They win graciously and lose with dignity.
- The ROOTS of Honoring the Game are respect for:
 - **Rules** – don’t bend the rules to win, even if you can get away with it.
 - **Opponents** – a worthy opponent is a gift; we want to play fierce and friendly.
 - **Officials** – show respect even when we are confident they are mistaken.
 - **Teammates** – never embarrass our teammates, in or outside the game.
 - **Self** – live up to our own standards no matter what opponents do.
- Winning seems so important in our society that many people dishonor the game in the heat of the moment. If they get caught, as so often happens, they are embarrassed and wish they could do it over right away. If they get away with it, the question is: What value is winning if you violate your own standards to do so?

- On the other hand, if you play hard and live up to the ROOTS of Honoring the Game but lose on the scoreboard, you can hold your head high.
 - Having one's own standards means you know how to behave regardless of what anyone else does. An opponent can trash talk, play dirty, bend the rules, but if you have integrity you act so you can be proud of yourself.
3. Discuss what to do when faced with challenging situations. How can you Honor the Game when:
- Your opponent is trash-talking?
 - Your opponent gives you a cheap shot the ref doesn't see?
 - An official makes a bad call in a crucial moment?
 - The officials are having an off-night, making one bad call after another?
 - You are being heckled mercilessly by opposing fans?
 - Your coach angers you in practice or during a game?
 - A teammate makes a selfish play that hurts your team?
4. Have your team read Chapter 3.2.
5. Read and complete *Exercise 8: Developing Honor the Game Routines together as a team*. To save time, you might assign athletes this exercise the night before and spend most of your time on the last prompt where you decide as a team on Honoring the Game routines.

► Why use it?

We spend lots of energy helping high school athletes become physically strong and able. That's good – it's a big part of what we do. At the same time, coaches often miss an opportunity to use sports to teach inner strength. In fact, sadly, we often let moral weakness co-exist with talent, sometimes without offering a challenge. We all know athletes who have gotten away with being jerks just because they helped a team win.

Chapter 3.3 in *Elevating Your Game* was written to help you enter discussions you may have never had with your athletes. Admittedly, talking about moral courage may feel a bit awkward. Take the plunge. What you say as a coach can make a huge, lifetime difference. And, considering the corruption, lying, and moral lapses the sports world and our nation has experienced in recent years, your impact in this area has never been more needed.

► How to use it?

1. Introduce the topic using one of the following options.

- **Option 1:** Read the story about Jackie Robinson and Pee Wee Reese on pages 69-70 in *Elevating Your Game* together as a team. Discuss the following questions: *Why would Reese stand up for Robinson? What did he have to gain? Do you think you would have the moral courage to stand up to the crowd and take a stand for what is right? What if the crowd included all of your closest friends? How can we express our own moral courage this season? (Note: You may want to show your athletes a picture of Reese and Robinson when you tell the story.)*

- **Option 2:** Use a marker to write down the following names, each in large letters on a separate single sheet of paper: **“Shoeless” Joe Jackson, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Floyd Landis, Marion Jones, and Jim Tressel** (or include the name of a disgraced sports figure from more recent headlines). Next, write down the following words, each on a separate sheet of paper: **Why Do Athletes Make Poor Moral Choices?** Make a stack of your sheets. Alternate the names with the words in the question. Hold these up one at a time. Then discuss these questions: *Why do athletes we all admire sometimes make really bad moral choices? What pressures produce such choices? Do high school athletes face any of these same pressures? What poor choices might some on our team be tempted to make? Could any of these choices damage the team or individuals on the team? How can we develop the moral courage it takes to avoid poor choices?*

2. Have athletes discuss scenarios in small groups.

- You are on a team trip. It is 2:00 a.m. and, despite your coach’s direction, you are still playing video games in your room. You have a competition early the next day. Your coach checked the room three hours ago. Somebody says, “Hey, we should sneak out and find a burger. I’m starved.” *How should you handle it?*
- It is Saturday night. You are out with friends and you end up at a party where alcohol is plentiful and free. *How should you handle it?*
- One member of your team is considered a dweeb. Others on your team make a point of picking on him every chance they get. It makes everyone else laugh. But the kid being picked on doesn’t think it is funny at all. *How should you handle it?*

- It is a tradition at your school to haze new players. That was true when your dad played on the team. It happened to you your freshman year. You were humiliated but never said anything. The freshman start practice next week, and team leaders are making plans to haze them. *How should you handle it?*
- You cheated and got away with it. You are pretty sure you can do it again and not be caught. *How should you handle it?*

3. Use these talking points.

- We often think about physical bravery when we talk about courage, like a firefighter entering a burning building. But, many of the injustices of the world happen because people don’t take a stand against them. It takes moral courage to take those stands.
- Moral courage is standing up publicly for what you believe is right even when others – including sometimes your friends and teammates – don’t.
- Human beings have a deep need to be a part of the group. That’s one reason why many participate in athletics – to be a part of something bigger than themselves and to make friends. So this tendency can be a really good thing that bonds us to others in really positive ways.
- The herd can sometimes convince athletes to pick on or even haze their own teammates. You can do something about this. Someone said, “Character is doing the right thing when nobody is watching.” That may be true, but sometimes the truest test of character comes when everyone is watching. If you know a teammate is being picked on or hazed, you need to stand up for them. Meanness is something we can never tolerate on our team.

4. Have your team read Chapter 3.3 in *Elevating Your Game*. Use these discussion questions to debrief the chapter.

- *Why do you think Pee Wee Reese stood up for Jackie Robinson?*
- *What do you think you would have done had you been in Pee Wee's shoes?*
- Sometimes the herd convinces athletes to pick on or even haze their own teammates. Close your eyes and answer these questions. *Have you ever been picked on or hazed? How did it feel? Have you ever picked on or hazed another person? How did that feel?*
- Open your eyes. *What can we do together as a team to make sure nobody on this team feels less than another? What can we do on this team to make sure everyone is treated with respect?*

Using Chapter 3.4: Using Your Power to Improve Your School Community and

16 Exercise 9: Making Your School Community Better

► Why use it?

Athletes have power. They may not think of themselves as powerful, but, to the grade school kid they help out at a camp, or to the second-stringer on their team, they may be a role model. To the lonely at a retirement home, they can be an angel. To their classmates in the hallway who receive a smile or a high-five, they can be an Emotional Tank filler. Chapter 3.4 challenges athletes and coaches to consider how to use their power to make a difference on their campus and in the community. We hope you take the challenge. It'll pay dividends in terms of team chemistry and bonding. And, you'll be teaching kids an important lesson – they can make a difference.

How to use it?

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1. **Introduce the topic.** One of the best ways to introduce this topic is to talk about others who have or who are making a difference. Examples from your own team or school's experience can be some of the most powerful. We provide a great example in Chapter 3.3, so you could simply read about and talk about Roberto Clemente together. CNN has a collection of videos at its CNN America's Heroes website. Great, short clips include one about Jordan Thomas, a high school student who lost his legs and now raises money for others to get prosthetics. Another features Eddie Carnales, who helps high school football players who have become paralyzed. A third, titled "Rocking out to stop bullying" deals with a high school rock band. All of these can be discussion starters to talk about the power we all have to make a difference and to discuss what the team can do to make a difference. Another short clip to consider comes from the Kidpower website. It is called "Walking in Another's Shoes."

It deals powerfully with the topic of bullying, and it was made by a group of teens, the same age as your athletes. (**Note:** There are several great websites to help counter bullying. These include The Bully Project (thebullyproject.com), No Bully (nobully.com), and KidPower (kidpower.org).)

2. Have your team read Chapter 3.4: Using Your Power to Improve Your School Community. Use these discussion questions to debrief the chapter.

- *What is the lesson in Roberto Clemente's story?*
- *Jim Thompson says athletes have power. Do you agree?*
- *Thompson says one thing athletes can do with their power is to reach out to or mentor younger players. Did anyone ever do that for you? Did it make a difference?*
- *Joe Ehrmann's highly successful Gilman Greyhounds football team never lets a teammate eat alone. This is a powerful idea. What do you think about having our team do the same thing?*
- *Thompson argues that high school athletes are perfectly positioned to do something about bullying on their campus. Is he right? What does Thompson say we all could do about bullying?*
- *Thompson says we could make our campus stronger by attending sporting events for other teams, especially ones that get less attention, like a frosh game. What events could you attend to make a difference for others?*
- *Our team could join together to complete a community service project, as Thompson suggests. What do you think of that idea? What could we do?*

3. Have your team complete Exercise 9: Making Your School Community Better. Discuss as a team and choose a team initiative to work together on.

► **Why use it?**

We surveyed high school athletes to identify the most common challenges they face. The seven covered in Chapter 4.1 were at the top of their list. These challenges include issues like how to balance a schedule when sports put a pinch on study time, how to combat the negative effects of cliques on a team, and what to do when you really want to play in college. Don't be surprised if this is the one chapter your athletes read on their own without any prompting from you or any other adult. Still, proactively addressing these issues with your team will likely help eliminate some team and individual issues before they occur.

► **How to use it?**

- 1. Discuss the scenarios together as a team.** Each of the seven common challenges begins with a scenario in bold. Simply read it aloud to your team or have different players read it aloud. Have them discuss their answers. Then share the advice provided.
- 2. Assign specific common challenges to different athletes on an as needed basis.** Some of common challenges like "Ouch! Dealing with Injuries" or "Wanting to Play College Sports" don't apply to every athlete, but will be very useful to injured athletes or those aspiring to play in college.
- 3. Use the common challenges to circle back to other concepts in *Elevating Your Game*.** For example, you may have already had a discussion about Honoring the Game, but you know you want to reinforce it. Use "Tempted to Cheat" as a launch pad to revisit that concept. Or, use "Cliques and Conflicts" to open up a fresh conversation about filling E-Tanks or the characteristics of great team culture.

4. Use the discussion questions below to debrief each topic in the chapter.

Way Too Much to Do (pages 78-81)

- Do you ever feel overwhelmed? What do you do when that happens?
- On pages 79-80, Jim Thompson has a number of suggestions for dealing with this problem. Which of them might be helpful to you?
- How would you complete your 5-Year Rule sentence: "When I was in high school, I'm glad I _____."
- What are you doing now that you could put on your Don't-Do List?
- Do you agree that "Perfectionism is a prescription for failure and unhappiness."? Why or why not? Do you agree that some things just need to get done and don't need to be perfect? Are there any things in your life that you could get out of the way without doing them perfectly?
- Do you skimp on sleep? Do you agree with Thompson that "Fatigue makes everything harder"? Do you ever take naps?
- What reinvigorates you? What activity might you put on your calendar in the next two weeks that would give you more energy?

Teammates Don't Care (pages 81-82)

- Do you ever feel like some of your teammates don't care as much as you do? How does that make you feel?
- Jim Thompson says that reframing might help you better deal with concerns about lack of effort or commitment among your teammates. What does "reframing" mean? How could it help you with this issue?
- Thompson gives four other tips for dealing with teammates who don't share your level of commitment: 1) Empathize, or

try to put yourself in other's shoes; 2) Share your emotional commitments through effort and enthusiasm; 3) Reward what you want to see by praising teammates and filling their E-Tanks when they show good effort; 4) Recognize your limits by acknowledging you cannot always control what others do or say. Which of these tips do you find most helpful?

Wanting to Play College Sports (pages 82-84)

- Anchoring is overvaluing one factor and devaluing all other aspects in a decision. How can anchoring keep you from making good choices about college athletics?
- Jim Thompson argues there are three crucial aspects of a college experience: the athletic experience, the student experience, and the alumni experience. Why are all three of these aspects important? Which is most important to you?
- How can listing your priorities for college and ranking each priority help you make a better choice about college athletics?
- What does Thompson mean by these pieces of advice about college selection? "Expand before you narrow." "Ask around." "Sample the goods."
- What are some ways you can set yourself up for success as you pursue college athletics?

Ouch! Dealing with Injuries (pages 85-86)

- Where can you go to get the best advice for when to return from an injury?
- How can you approach your rehab exactly like practices and games?
- How can injuries have an upside?
- How can you resist the pressure to come back too soon?
- What can you do to help the team while you are injured?

Coach Problems (pages 86-87)

- *How can recognizing that “coaching is hard” help you with negative attitudes you might have about your coach?*
- *Thompson says to not allow negative attitudes toward your coach ruin your sports experience. How can you do that?*
- *Why is using your energy to complain about your coach a losing proposition? How does Thompson say we should “focus our energy”?*
- *Why is “talking out of school” so counterproductive?*
- *What are some of Thompson’s ideas for having a productive discussion with your coach about concerns you have with him/her?*

Cliques and Conflict (pages 87-88)

- *Have you ever been excluded by a clique? How did that feel?*
- *Have you ever been in a clique that excluded others? How did that feel?*
- *Jim Thompson suggests reaching out to people who aren’t part of your group. If you got to know better those teammates that you don’t know so well, do you think that would make your team better?*

Tempted to Cheat (pages 88-9)

- *Jim Thompson implies that people cheat because they are weak. Do you agree?*
- *Do you agree with, “But cheaters always pay a price?” Why or why not?*
- *Does thinking of yourself as a Triple-Impact Competitor help you avoid the temptation to cheat?*