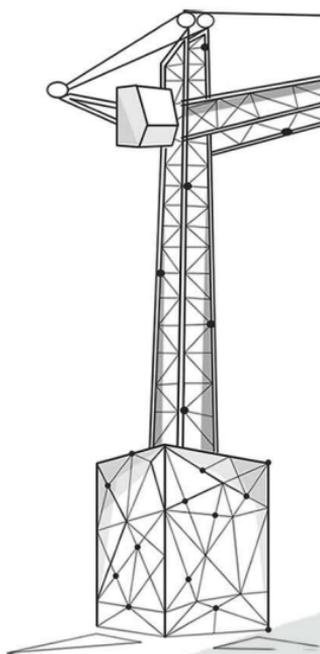


# ABC's of Mental Performance



Build a **VICTOR** Mindset



— TK LaFleur —



# **ABC's of Mental Performance**

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TK LaFleur

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## Preface

*ABC's of Mental Performance* was created as a way to reach athletes and emphasize the importance of training and focusing on your mental performance. Your mental performance dictates how you handle the ebbs and flows of the game. The teams, or players, that handle adversity the best often come out on top.

When it comes to sports, your physical skills and talents will get you noticed and propel you far (with hard work of course). What separates the good from the great and the great from exceptional is the mentality, resilience, and mental toughness these athletes possess when adversity strikes; and adversity WILL strike. It's not always what you do and how you respond when things are going well, it's about what you do and how you respond when things are not going your way.

This booklet is designed to provide some insight into characteristics that help athletes build mental toughness. Coaches frequently talk about mental toughness to their players, yet many players do not always know what that entails. This booklet aims to bridge that gap.

As you read through the booklet, think about how you can begin to incorporate these skills into your mental toughness skillset.

Kobe Bryant (NBA), Jewell Loyd (WNBA), Jake Arrieta (MLB), Russell Wilson (NFL) and many other top athletes across many sports have been known to work with a mental performance coach.

*“The mental game is what separates the good players from the great players. So, anything I can do to get that mental edge to help me stay my best, I’m gonna try and do it.”*

-- Aaron Judge (MLB)

## Introduction

I learned that the closer I got to game time the more importance I needed to place on my mental preparation. The mental approach to sports is truly where athletes separate themselves. Everyone is talented. Everyone can do the fundamentals in their respective sport. Everyone does not have the VICTOR Mindset. My name is TK LaFleur, Founder of WIN The Ball Stops. WIN The Ball Stops empowers athletes to push past limits, develop mental fortitude and the resilience needed to overcome challenges. WIN The Ball Stops is about WINning during the pauses in sports and life. Athletes train a lot. We do sport specific training, weight training, agility training and conditioning among many other things. What we don't always spend adequate time training, if any, is our mindset. I know this from my own personal experience as a Division I and professional basketball player. Our mentality, or our mindset, drives everything we do and how we respond.

Let's dive into the *ABC's of Mental Performance*. Keep in mind this is not the end all be all list of words pertaining to mental performance. There are

many topics that go into mental performance. These are just the words/concepts I chose to focus on when writing this booklet.

*“If I don’t use my struggle to impact others in a positive way, then I have wasted my struggle.”*

## Attitude

Attitude is a decision. You can choose to have a bad attitude. You can choose to have a great attitude. You may not be able to alter your situation/circumstance, but you can alter your attitude. CHOOSE to find the silver lining. CHOOSE to eliminate the ‘woe is me’ attitude. CHOOSE a positive attitude and you will experience joy and happiness more often. No skill is required to have a great attitude.

Your positive attitude should be non-negotiable for your optimal performance swag.

Remember attitudes are contagious.

Is your attitude worth catching?

## Body Language

Take a moment to visualize how your body language presents when you are feeling confident.

Big. Bold. Tall. Head up. Shoulders back. Eye contact with everyone you talk to or that is talking to you. Moving with confidence. Speaking with confidence. Leading with confidence.

Your body language bleeds into your self-confidence. That energy that you generate physically with your body language transfers to your mentality which transfers to how you perform. When all of that is flowing together you can be unstoppable.

Your body language SCREAMS and SHOUTS everything you are feeling and thinking. Exude confidence, poise, and excitement. The energy you create within yourself, through your body language, spreads like wildfire to the rest of your body and your teammates.

Body language matters!

Body Language lets everyone know:

- you are still fighting and haven't given up, if it's positive.

- you are engaged, attentive, and coachable, if it's positive
- exactly when to crush you, if it's negative.
- That they have crushed you, if it's negative.

Always Behave Confidently.

## **Consistency**

Consistency is one of the most significant aspects a player can demonstrate in competition and practice. There is a trust and reliability that is built up between a player and coach when the player performs consistently day in and day out.

If a coach had to choose between a player who would be a “nine” one game and then a “four” the next, or a player who was consistently a “seven,” he would take the “seven” every day of the week. Consistency develops trust, growth and establishes character. Without consistency, you fall short of what you are pursuing.

To perform consistently you must lead a consistent life, in your training efforts, daily habits, mindset, and emotions.

Cal Ripken is in the baseball Hall of Fame. He wasn't the best hitter. He wasn't the best fielder. He wasn't the best player, but he was the most consistent. He played 2,632 consecutive games. Wow, he showed up every day. Not everyone shows up every day, but he did.

## Discipline

Discipline is having a plan and working the plan.  
Discipline is doing the right thing when nobody is looking.

Discipline is:

- getting your workout(s) done for the day
- not skipping sets/reps/class
- how you respond and react
- being on time (which really means early) to workouts/class/training sessions
- doing a little a lot, and not a lot a little

Personal growth is like the Chinese bamboo sticks. A Chinese bamboo stick takes 5 years to pop above the surface. Once it pops up you can visually see it growing; but you have to water and fertilize it for all that time. In fact, in 5 weeks once it is above the surface it can grow up to 90 feet tall. Personal growth works similarly, it works behind the scenes. **YOU MAY NOT SEE EVIDENCE OF IT** for a while because it is growing inside of you. You have to keep fertilizing and watering, then one day all of a sudden you will show unbelievable growth.

However, your friends and your colleagues may ridicule you. They may laugh at it and tease you that nothing has changed. You see some of them quit on their dream, some of them give up on their goals, but if you keep going you will be like that bamboo tree. You will shoot up in the sky.

*“You can’t get much done in life if you only work on the days you feel good.” --Jerry West*

## **Exhibit Self-Control**

Self-control is the most effective way to show your strength. If you learn how to not let anything ruffle your feathers and if you learn how to control your emotions and body language during adversity you have won much of the battle.

When you exhibit self-control, you are better able to:

- lead your team
- make the best decision in the moment
- capitalize on in-game advantages

Your team follows your lead and your energy during practice and during games. Model for them an example of what remaining calm in the face adversity looks like.

You have to be in control of yourself **BEFORE** you can control your performance.

## Focus

When you walk into any training session or game, are you focused on what you need to do to get better and win the day?

When the game is on the line and every possession matters even more, where does your focus go?

Do you know how to eliminate distractions or refocus your attention when your mind wanders?

Focus is about being where your feet are. Focus is your ability to zero in on the task at hand. When you channel your attention and focus you are able to truly tap into the skills you have and bring those out of you every possession. With focus comes intention. With intention comes growth. When you are intentionally focused on the task at hand you are taking control of your growth as an athlete.

Obsession with the past = depression

Obsession with the future = anxiety

Obsession with the present = optimal performance

*“He did each thing as if he did nothing else.”*

*--Charles Dickens*

## **GOOD Mentality**

This is the mentality you should choose whenever any wrinkle in sports or in life comes your way.  
GOOD = another opportunity to do things differently or do things better.

The GOOD mentality is all about owning your response to adversity. Taking ownership of your actions, attitude, work ethic, commitment, etc in the face of adversity is powerful. Take ownership in every area of your life if you truly want to succeed at a high level.

When an event happens, how quickly can you pick your response and influence the outcome?

When you miss a shot, GOOD! --> Another opportunity to get a rebound.

When you turn the ball over, GOOD! --> Another opportunity to get a defensive stop.

You didn't make the team, GOOD! --> Another opportunity to enhance my skills and get better.

How quickly can you get into the mindset of GOOD?

**E**vent + **R**esponse = **O**utcome

## **Handling Adversity**

I was working with a client that was talking about how difficult college was for them. They were constantly complaining about it being so hard and wanting to quit their sport all together and even considered dropping out. So, I decided to use 3 pots of water to teach a lesson.

In the first pot we placed carrots, in the second pot eggs, and in the last pot, ground coffee beans.

We then went back to the table where we would be eating and let the carrots, eggs and coffee sit and boil for about 20 minutes. As they continued to boil, we continued to talk about my clients' challenges.

Time had passed and I went to get the carrots, eggs and cup of coffee and put them on the table.

I asked my athlete "What do you see?"

The athlete replied "Carrots, eggs, and coffee."

I asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they felt soft.

I asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, I asked her to sip the coffee. She smiled as she tasted its rich aroma.

The athlete then asked, "What's the point of all this?"

I explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity - boiling water - but each reacted differently.

The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting; and after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak.

The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. After sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened.

The ground coffee beans were unique and excellent. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

Which are you? When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

Are you the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity, you wilt and become soft and lose strength?

Are you the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat and pressure? Do you have a fluid spirit, but after a loss, getting injured or getting benched you become hardened and stiff? Does your exterior shell look the same, but on the inside, you are bitter with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart?

Or are you the coffee bean? The coffee bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor.

If you are like the coffee bean, when things are at their worst you are at your best. When the heat is on, you get better, not bitter, and change the situation around you.

#BeTheCoffeeBean

## **Intentional**

When it comes to getting better at your craft, you have to be intentional. Be intentional with your training. Be intentional with your focus. Be intentional with your time. Be intentional with your nutrition. Be intentional with your growth. Be intentional with yourself.

John Maxwell's Law of Intentionality states "Growth doesn't just happen." Take your growth into your own hands. Now is the perfect time to start. Don't wait for the future to become the athlete you want to be. Start being the athlete you want to be right now.

Be Present, not perfect.

*"If your dreams are bigger than that of your friends then your life should look different."*

## **Juggling Emotions**

In competition, emotions (positive or negative) will be present. Learning to play with emotion and passion without it becoming a distraction is the key to playing at optimal performance.

If your emotions sway often, your performance can and will sway often.

Too much fear, frustration, anger, or disappointment will put you in a place mentally, emotionally, and physiologically that will make it very difficult to find consistency in your performances.

**AVERAGE** athletes let feelings drive their behaviors.

**ELITE** athletes let behaviors change their feelings.

## Knowledge

The worst thing an athlete can do to stop growing is to assume they know everything. When an athlete closes their mind off to knowledge/coaching they are essentially saying “I don’t need help.” As an athlete, you can learn from everyone, every situation, anytime, anywhere. You can learn what to do and/or what not to do.

The key to consistently growing your knowledge is to have a growth mindset, which means keeping open the underlying desire to learn. View setbacks as opportunities to learn. Get fascinated, not frustrated, when adversity occurs. The more fascinated you get, the more you will learn. Getting fascinated opens you up to finding solutions to the problem and creating your new plan of attack.

*“When you grow, you are putting your future into motion. With every step toward the future, hope is reinforced and strengthened.”* —John Maxwell

## **Leadership**

Being a leader does not require a captain's title. Leaders show up every day. Leaders are consistently vocal throughout workouts, practices and games. Leaders encourage their teammates and pick them up when the coaches are being tough or when they see a teammate struggling. Leaders give reminders before they are needed. Leaders are the extension of the coach on the playing surface. Leaders demand excellence of themselves and of their teammates.

Leadership is a full-time job. When you feel like bringing it the least, that is when it is needed the most. Leaders look outward when adversity strikes, not inward nor do they shut down.

Leadership is influence. Nothing more. Nothing less.

## Mental Imagery

Mental imagery is such a powerful way to get yourself and/or keep yourself mentally engaged during practice or competition. Mental imagery is your ability to visualize what you want to happen during competition. Mental imagery does not guarantee instant success or perfect performances, but it does put you in the right headspace to perform at a high level. When you use mental imagery, the images created in your mind flow through you and into your performance. Use mental imagery to enhance your confidence, better prepare for competition and better learn yourself.

Mental imagery can be used:

- Right before shooting a free throw (basketball)
- As part of your pre-game routine (any sport)
- Before each pitch (baseball/softball)
- Before your turn at bat (baseball/softball)
- Before each serve (volleyball)

Everything happens twice. First in your mind then in reality.

## **Negate Limiting Beliefs**

When an elephant was very young and weighed only several hundred pounds, it was restricted by having a chain clasped to its leg and connected to a tree or deep stake. When it tried to move away and learned that it could not break the chain, it limited itself. It believed that whatever restriction was put on it, even a rope that could have easily broken, was more powerful than it was.

People are like elephants. We often believe that some of the restrictions we may have experienced earlier in life are permanent; or we have been told we have limitations that we don't actually possess. These things are keeping us from taking the journey in life that we long for. Always embrace the "I belong here" mindset. Remember, you are a work in progress. It's not I can't do this, or I can't do that; it's I struggle with this or I struggle with that. A simple reframing changes your mindset just enough to get you back to work. Limits exist only in the mind.

These are CHAINS we need to break.

Don't let people talk fear into your plans. Fear can mean 2 things:

1. **F**ace **E**verything **A**nd **R**ise
2. **F**ace **E**verything **A**nd **R**un

You decide.

## **Open to Coaching**

The best way to show a coach you are coachable, and they have your full attention is with eye contact, body language, and a listening ear. Listen to feedback and coaching whether in the film room or on the playing surface. Hear those comments as ways to get better and that the coach believes in you and not as if they are trying to break you.

Another great way to be coachable is to not take things personally. This is a mistake I see time and time again, and I did sometimes during my playing days. Coaches can be and will be tough on players. Showing mental toughness, in these scenarios, is not allowing a coach being hard on you to negatively impact your confidence or self-talk.

Lastly, pay attention when the coach is teaching another player. Coaches love players that can learn and absorb teaching points without having to be coached directly.

*“My best skill was that I was coachable. I was a sponge and aggressive to learn.”* -- Michael Jordan

## **Preparation**

The way you prepare says everything about you as a competitor and an athlete. Your mental preparation for training sessions and competition is what will give you an edge over your competition.

When I was trying out for a women's tackle football team, I showed up 30 minutes before we were supposed to start the tryouts because I knew myself and what I needed to get mentally prepared to perform. While going through my physical warm up (dynamic stretching, laps around the field, static stretching etc), I was also mentally preparing. I took the time to mentally lock in and bring my mind to the present moment. I used many of my self-talk phrases and techniques that I used in basketball to prepare myself for the football tryout. Later after making the team and building a player/coach relationship with the coach, he told me he knew I was on a different level and that he wanted me on his team simply because of how I set myself apart starting in warmups. Those intangible qualities coaches notice and want in players on their team. Those are winning levels of preparation.

Physical preparation includes your training sessions, lifting weights, conditioning and practice.

Mental preparation is how you mentally get ready for a game. Everything from how you warm up before each game/workout session to your self-talk to understanding the game plan and anything in between is all part of preparation. It could also mean watching film of yourself or your upcoming opponent or visualization. Preparation is reviewing your mental performance game plan to make sure you have your mental skillset ready for those critical moments in the game.

*“The will to succeed is important, but what’s more important is the will to prepare.” -- Bobby Knight*

## **Quest for Competitive Excellence**

The quest for competitive excellence is a road only a few travel. Everybody wants to travel this road, but only a few actually put in the work and dedicate everything to the journey. This quest requires the ultimate sacrifices. Dedication. Commitment. Perseverance. Nothing gets in the way; nothing stops an athlete on the quest for competitive excellence. On the quest for excellence there are no days off.

Every single day in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every single day a lion wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will starve. It doesn't matter whether you're a lion or gazelle, when the sun comes up you better be running.

*“Excellence is never an accident; it is the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction, skillful execution and the vision to see obstacles as opportunities.” –Anonymous*

## Respect

Respect yourself.

Respect others.

Respect your coaches.

Respect your parents/guardians.

Respect your teammates.

Respect your trainers.

Respect the support staff.

Respect the managers.

Respect your opponents.

Respect your time and others' time.

Respect the referees/umpires.

Respect your teachers/professors.

Respect your tutors/mentors.

Respect your academic advisors.

Respect the name on the front of the uniform.

Respect the game.

*“I’m not concerned with your liking or disliking me.  
All I ask is that you respect me as a human being.”*

-- Jackie Robinson

## **Self-Talk**

Your self-talk is part of the formula for increased confidence and success. Self-talk is what you are telling yourself about yourself, actions, habits, etc. Are you talking yourself up or talking yourself down?

You have to learn to study your self-talk. Yes, studying your self-talk will allow you to focus on the subconscious ideas and thoughts you are telling yourself and ultimately believing.

The power of positive self-talk:

- Builds confidence
- Improves attitude
- Promotes self-love
- Encourages motivation
- Helps you work through challenges (adversity)

Don't be a victim of negative self-talk. Remember you are listening.

## Toughness

There are many layers of toughness, but this book is all about mental toughness. Developing mental toughness is about improving your ability to regulate your emotions, manage your thoughts, and behave in a positive manner, despite your circumstances.

Mental toughness is:

- Acting according to your values
- Interpreting and understanding how your emotions influence your thoughts and behaviors
- Thinking realistically and rationally
- Making the decisions that will help you reach your full potential
- Not giving your power away
- Not dwelling on the past (good or bad)
- Celebrating the wins of others

*“You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.”*

-- Marcus Aurelius

## **Unshakeable Confidence**

Confidence comes from the practice and preparation that you are doing to separate yourself from others. Without confidence in who you are and your abilities, your entire self-worth may depend on how others feel about you. That is not a recipe for success.

Confidence is a choice. You don't GET confidence, you DO confidence with your body language, focus, self-talk. Build your confidence from:

- your preparation.
- your positive self-talk.
- trusting in your skills and abilities.
- your previous successes and accomplishments.

Don't allow your confidence to be dictated by an outside source.

Don't allow your confidence to be dictated by something you cannot control (outcome).

Let the PROCESS dictate your confidence.

Consistent preparation leads to consistent confidence.

## **VICTOR Mentality**

When you have a VICTOR Mentality, you are POWERFUL. VICTOR Mentality puts you in position to perform consistently at your highest level. When the game is on the line, those with the VICTOR Mentality, will shine. They will stand out in the crowd. Athletes with a VICTOR Mentality exude confidence and a calmness about themselves. They are fearless in their pursuit of greatness and never back down from the big moments. VICTOR Mentality athletes take ownership, are accountable to themselves and the team, and take responsibility for their actions.

You put yourself in position to:

- Make things happen
- Find solutions
- Embrace adversity
- Acknowledge reality

Elevate to a VICTOR Mentality.

## **Watch Your Habits**

Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. Success is the product of daily habits, not once in a lifetime transformation. You should be far more concerned with your current trajectory than with your current results.

Do things today that will get you to where you want to be tomorrow. Breakthrough moments are often the results of many previous actions, which build up the potential required to unleash a major change.

It is these same daily habits that turn a player nobody talks about into an “overnight success.” You have the potential in you to be great. The question is are you willing to put in the daily work to unleash your potential? Your daily habits will answer this question. The beauty is if you don’t like the answer, you can change it right now.

*“New goals don’t deliver new results. New lifestyles do.*

*And a lifestyle is a process, not an outcome.*

*For this reason, your energy should go into building better habits, not chasing better results.” --James Clear*

## **X-Out Excuses**

Excuses sound a lot like complaining. When things in sports do not go your way, reframe the situation.

Complaining about the situation will not change it. If anything, complaining makes it worse.

Finding excuses is another area that takes away from the VICTOR Mentality. Excuses detract from the goal. Excuses prevent buy in. Excuses drain energy.

Excuses take the fun out of everything. Excuses accomplish nothing.

Realistically, you will not always feel like working out every single day. You are not going to want to stick to your nutrition plan every meal; but just because those feelings exist does not mean you should give in or use that feeling to give in.

*“If it is important to you, you will find a way. If not, you will find an excuse.” -- Daniel Decker*

## Yet To Be

You are not defined by your past failures. You are not defined by your past successes. All that matters is what you are doing now and what you will accomplish going forward. Every day is a new day to build your story. Every day is a new day to build new habits. Every day is a new day to decide what you want to be. Your past reflects what you have accomplished and should give you confidence to achieve more going forward. Your past also reflects many lessons learned and areas for you to improve as you are continuing to build your story every day.

Believe that the best thing to happen to you is ahead of you, not behind you. Work like the best is ahead daily. Consistently focusing on your past achievements will not guarantee future success, but it can be the footstool you use to propel you to your next set of achievements. Use your past achievements as encouragement or motivation to keep working at your craft. Use your past achievements to build up and increase your confidence.

Focus on your windshield, not your rearview mirror.

## **Zzz... Sleep is Important**

Sleep is a vital component to your success. You don't want lack of sleep to be the reason you don't perform at your highest. When you get a great night sleep you are putting yourself in position to perform your best and remain consistent. Sleep also starts the recovery process that your body and brain need in order to be fresh the next day.

To ensure you are getting the best sleep you can each night, establish a night routine. Learn to quiet your mind and let go of the issues of today and the worries of tomorrow so your mind can rest. Your night routine, which leads to great sleep, is actually what will jumpstart you for the next morning.

Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance.

There it is athletes and coaches. Some of the most common and popular topics that encompass mental performance. As your mental fitness coach, I coach these, and many other topics, related to mental performance and mindset to help athletes and teams get a mental advantage in competition.

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. I hope you carry it with you and refer back to these topics as often as you need. If you can instill these principles into your way of thinking, you will be the most mentally prepared and complete athlete taking the court/field.

Continue to work on your sport specific training, lifting weights, getting in shape and eating properly. It takes all of these areas to become the complete athlete you aspire to be.

***Mindset trumps ability!***

Other books written by TK LaFleur:

*Breaking The Silence Basketball's Hidden Secrets*

Available on Amazon

<https://amzn.to/3ffG1uP>

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