



YOUTHFIRST

Psychological Attributes, Not Physical Gifts of Young Athletes Predict Success

In a new study examining how much psychological and physical characteristics matter in the development of young athletes, psychologist Shari Kuchenbecker, Ph.D., and co-authors from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles found that psychological factors were most important in achieving athletic success. And too much pressure and criticism were the most harmful to a young athlete's development. "The number one quality that coaches see as a real winner is loving to play the sport," said Dr. Kuchenbecker. "Having a positive attitude, being coachable, self-motivated and being a team player followed as the next top attributes of winning athletes."

"Many young athletes have negative forces motivating them to succeed in sports, like pleasing their parents, getting a college scholarship or fitting into the various jock cliques at school," said Dr. Kuchenbecker. "This study shows that the coaches who teach these children about sports create winners by emphasizing the positive personal development of the young athlete. It is an important reminder to parents, coaches and educators of the healthy function sports play in the overall development of young people."

Dr. Kuchenbecker and her co-authors discovered this by asking 658 coaches (75% male and 25% female) of young athletes (between 3-22 years old) who participate in 43 sports to characterize a young athlete of winning potential from a list of 64 physical and 64 psychological characteristics.

Coaches across the board emphasized the importance of psychological factors as essential for athletic success in young people. "This was true for the youth athletic coaches (American Youth Soccer Organization [AYSO], club and high school athletic events, elementary schools) as well as the coaches from U.S. Junior National Championship competitions and 17 NCAA Division 1 coaches at Stanford University, winner for the fifth straight year of the prestigious Sears Cup for the top number of championships across sports," said Dr. Kuchenbecker.

Of all the psychological and physical characteristics the coaches could choose from as essential traits to succeeding as an athlete, 43 percent picked *loves to play*, 32.7 percent picked *positive attitude*, 29.8 percent picked *coachable*, 27.4 percent picked *self-motivated*, and 25.7 percent picked *team player*.

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Volume 1, Series 1
7th and 8th Girls

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MEDIA SHEDS LIGHT ON DIFFERENCES IN ATTRIBUTES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Because we believe that media attention is a critical element of the competitive sport experience, CAAWS has published **Making the Most of Your Opportunities: A Media Guide for Athletes and Their Coaches**.

The Media Guide, produced in partnership with Athletes CAN, the Canada Games Council, the Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport, the Canadian Olympic Association, the Canadian Paralympic Committee, the Coaching Association of Canada, the Commonwealth Games Association of Canada, and Sport Canada, was written by a team of sports journalists and sports media relations experts led by CAAWS communications consultant Sheila Robertson. It is available in English and French.

The goals of the Media Guide are to help Canada's athletes and coaches, female and male, to present themselves to the media as the dynamic, skilled, dedicated, and accomplished individuals they are; through polished performances in front of the cameras, on radio, and in the print media, to raise the profile and level of interest in "amateur" sport in Canada; to supply athletes and coaches with well-written and timely material which will help them to craft their own successful messages; and to invite female and male athlete and coaches, if they are so inclined, to use their media profile to encourage girls and women to participate in sport.

Through our partners, the Media Guide is being to selected athletes and coaches across Canada. It is also available through the CAAWS National Office at a cost of \$15.00. The first athletes and coaches to benefit from the Guide were the members of the 1998 Commonwealth Games Team. Over the coming months, excerpts from the Media Guide will be published in ACTION. We begin with "Media Relations: A Two-Way Street" by Sheila Robertson.

"...their sporting achievements give them a potent platform..."

Despite the phenomenal growth of women's sport, coverage in newspapers and on radio and television remains largely devoted to men's sports. And when women athletes are the subject of reports and commentary, they are sometimes referred to in words that treat them differently than men, often in ways which downplay or trivialize their achievements.

A favorite example: **"She is a comely nubile with hazel eyes, a glowing complexion, and a decidedly feminine grace. There's no hint of testosterone in her nature."** That's goaltender Manon Rheaume as described by The Toronto Star.

Admittedly, that quote dates from 1994, but Rheaume continues to attract commentary on her looks.

Most members of the media agree that sports commentary and reporting, like the use of the English language in general, should reflect the fundamental equality of women and men, both on and off the field. Athletes, coaches, and the media share the responsibility for ensuring that this equality of reporting happens.

A few years ago, CAAWS offered the media a few suggestions, which have since gained widespread acceptance. It's good advice for athletes and coaches as well.

- Just as male athletes are generally referred to as "men" or "young men", refer to female athletes as "women" or "young women", and not as "girls" unless they are under 12 years of age. In our opinion, individual athletes should not be referred to as "ladies". However, if the sport is known as "Ladies' Golf", it is of course appropriate to use that term.
- Avoid descriptions which place too much emphasis on physical appearances or skills not related to athletic performance.
- Avoid the use of inappropriate nouns, adjectives, and adverbs when describing athletes. Inappropriate words include "moody"; "shapely/curvaceous/well-built"; "cute"; "pixie", "bouncy"; "coquette"; and "jockette". Also to be avoided are words that suggest weakness such as "indecisive", "out of control", "shaky", and "panicked".

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SIXTEEN ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE

1. **Ability to Communicate** — The ability to speak, write and listen effectively.
2. **Intelligence** — Common sense. The ability to understand an assignment, remember it, and follow it through to successful completion.
3. **Self-Confidence** — The quality that lies somewhere between timidity and arrogance. The ability to take a stand and defend it.
4. **Willingness to Accept Responsibility** — A willingness to take on the challenge of the hard job. To do whatever is necessary in order to accomplish the required task.
5. **Initiative** — Self -motivation. The ability to learn an overall operation and work within it with little or no supervision.
6. **Leadership** — The ability to guide and motivate others as demonstrated by leadership roles in collegiate, community, employment, or other organizations.
7. **Energy Level** — The ability to be positive and goal-directed. Getting the job done regardless of the time required.
8. **Imagination** — "Idea People". The ability to find solutions to problems, especially the problems that have no common or textbook solutions.
9. **Flexibility** — The absence of rigidity. The ability to adapt to different situations, be capable of change, receptive to new ideas and situations, and evaluate a variety of concepts on how to perform a task.
10. **Interpersonal Skills** — The ability to get along with others and make them feel good about themselves. The displaying of a pleasant, positive personality and a healthy self-image.
11. **Self-Knowledge** — The ability to realistically assess oneself. Knowing who you are, what you want to do, what your good at, where you want to live, etc.
12. **Ability to Handle Stress** — The ability to effectively manage stress and to meet time requirements with poise.
13. **Goal Achievement** — The ability to identify, work toward, and reach worthy goals.
14. **Collaborate** — To project that we win by team effort and respect for each of us and all of us. Can be demonstrated through athletic, academic, and employment achievements.
15. **Vocational Skills** — The possession of technical and general skills required for employment being sought.
16. **Direction** — The ability to develop a life plan and know where you're going. To be able to define what you want in your personal and professional life and why.



SUCCESS Continued...

The coaches also cited the two top damaging forces that hurt developing athletes: criticism (16.8%) and pressure (12.2%)," said Dr. Kuchenbecker.

The physical skills that were rated as important to succeed by the coaches, which were far below the psychological characteristics, were *natural physical athlete* (10.2%), *good eye-hand coordination* (8.8%) and *coordinated for age* (4.0%).

The sports examined were baseball and Little League (14.8%); basketball (17%); football (8.4%); soccer, including AYSO (19.8%); softball (8.1%); volleyball (7.9%); swimming and diving (4.7%); tennis (2.8%); track and field, including cross-country (2.9%); water polo (1.6%) and a range of other sports, including ice hockey, badminton, fencing, martial arts, wrestling, golf, downhill skiing and ultimate frisbee. The coaches rating the athletes averaged 7.8 years of experience, with a range of 1 to 42 years of experience.

DIFFERENCES Continued...

Sometimes, women athletes use less-than-flattering terms to describe themselves to the media. Some seem uncomfortable using powerful descriptives that adequately reflect their athletic attributes—words such as **"dynamic", "powerful", "agile", "gutsy", "leader", "aggressive", and "swift"**. They forget that their sporting achievements give them a potent platform—for discussing the drive and determination with which they pursue their sporting dreams, for turning more and more girls on to sport, and for challenging the attitude that women can't go the distance.

As important role models for young Canadians, your impact is profound. You reach thousands of youngsters, and their parents, too.

Your message can be something as simple as, "Being involved in sport is important for both girls and boys", or you can follow the example of some top athletes who used their media platform at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games to reach out to girls and women.

During a post-game interview, basketball player Lisa Leslie, 1996 Olympic gold medallist, looked straight into the camera and said: **"I want to say something to the young girls who are watching—you can dream your dreams, and you can do everything I have done."**

1996 Olympic swimmer Amy Van Dyken challenged the notion that it is not feminine to be muscular by saying: **"Nowadays it's cool to be able to bench press your husband."**

Male athletes can also use their media platform to encourage girls and women to take up sport. Cycling silver medallist Brian Walton spoke effectively of the impact a woman athlete had on his life: **"Back in '76, I was just a young kid in Halifax, and I lived on the same street as [swimmer] Nancy Garapick. She won two bronze medals and I got to see them. I've always dreamed of winning an Olympic medal, and now my dream has come true."**

Softball standout and Olympic gold medallist Dot Richardson made the point when she said, "One of my greatest joys is knowing that my five nieces have an exciting future. I want them to have the same opportunities as my five nephews. I'll do anything I can to make that happen."

No one expresses the value of girls and women in sport better than Canada's great rower Silken Laumann, who said: **"One of the most valuable things that sport can do for us as women is to give us the confidence to discover our dreams for ourselves and then develop the confidence to explore those dreams."**

Women athletes are no different than their male colleagues in the skill, dedication, and courage they bring to their sports. The challenge is to tell your stories as effectively as possible and to do your part in portraying your own achievements accurately.