



TNM ATHLETE YOUNG ADULT GUIDE

You Are More Than the Scoreboard

If you've played sports for very long, you've probably had a game you wish you could erase.

Maybe you struck out with the bases loaded. Maybe you missed an open shot, dropped a pass, turned the ball over, or simply had one of those days where nothing seemed to go right. Whatever it was, you probably remember it far more clearly than all the games that went well.

Athletes have a funny way of doing that. We can spend months getting stronger, becoming better teammates, and improving our skills, only to let one bad game convince us we've forgotten how to play. Somehow, one mistake feels louder than a hundred good decisions. I know that feeling because I've lived it.

When I was younger, I thought being a good athlete meant making fewer mistakes than everyone else. The older I've gotten, the more I've realized that's almost never what separates good athletes from great ones. The best athletes still make mistakes. They still have bad games. They still doubt themselves sometimes. The difference is they don't allow one moment to become their identity.

That's harder than it sounds because sports have a way of making us believe our performance and our worth are the same thing. Play well, and you feel confident. Play poorly, and suddenly you're questioning everything. Before long, the scoreboard isn't just keeping score of the game—it feels like it's keeping score of you. It isn't.

Your sport is something you do. It isn't who you are. The scoreboard measures performance. It can never measure your character, your potential, or the kind of teammate and person you're becoming.

That's one of the greatest gifts sports can give you if you're willing to let it. Sports teach discipline, resilience, humility, teamwork, and perseverance, but they also reveal the stories we tell ourselves when things don't go our way. Learning how to handle those moments will shape you long after the final whistle, long after the last game, and long after your playing days are over.

If you can remember that, you'll discover something many athletes never do. The game can shape you, challenge you, and make you better, but it never gets to decide your worth.

Every Athlete Has Doubts

One of the biggest surprises about sports is realizing that confidence isn't something you earn once and keep forever. Even after a great game, a great season, or years of experience, doubt has a way of showing up when you least expect it.

You look around and assume everyone else is confident. Your teammates seem relaxed. The other team looks fearless. The older players carry themselves like they've never questioned themselves for a second. Meanwhile, you're wondering if you're prepared, if you're good enough, or if today is the day everyone figures out you don't belong out there.

The truth is, almost every athlete has those thoughts. They just don't usually talk about them.

I've known athletes who looked completely confident before every game, only to admit later they were nervous every single time. I've known starters who wondered if they'd lose their spot, seniors who questioned whether they were good enough to play in college, and talented athletes who spent more time thinking about their mistakes than their successes.

That's one of the strange things about competition. It doesn't just test your physical abilities. It exposes what's happening between your ears. The pressure doesn't create doubt; it reveals the doubt that was already there.

The mistake most athletes make is believing those thoughts mean something is wrong with them. They don't. They mean you care. They mean you're challenging yourself. They mean you're stepping into situations where the outcome isn't guaranteed, and that's exactly where growth happens.

Over time, I've learned that confidence isn't the absence of doubt. It's choosing to compete anyway. It's trusting your preparation even when your mind is trying to convince you otherwise. It's understanding that you don't have to feel fearless to perform well.

Every athlete you admire has heard that little voice telling them they weren't ready, weren't good enough, or might fail. The difference is they learned not to let that voice make their decisions.

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

If there is one opponent every athlete faces, it's the voice inside their own head.

Sometimes it shows up after a mistake. Other times it appears before the game even starts. It quietly asks questions you don't really want to answer. What if I mess up again? What if Coach loses confidence in me? What if I'm just not good enough? The longer you listen, the more convincing those thoughts become.

I remember driving home after games and replaying every mistake I made. I wasn't thinking about the things I'd done well. I was replaying the missed opportunity, the bad decision, or the play I wished I could have back. By the time I got home, I'd convinced myself everyone else was thinking about those mistakes just as much as I was. Looking back now, I realize most of them had already moved on. I was the only one still carrying them.

That's what negative stories do. They take one moment and slowly turn it into an identity. A bad game becomes, Maybe I'm not good enough. One mistake becomes, I always mess things up. Before long, you're no longer remembering what happened—you're believing that's who you are.

The truth is, every athlete makes mistakes. Every athlete gets beat. Every athlete has bad games, bad practices, and moments they'd like to have back. Those moments aren't evidence that you don't belong. They're evidence that you're competing.

One of the most important lessons sports can teach you is that what you do and who you are are not the same thing. You can play poorly and still be a great teammate. You can lose and still become a better athlete. You can fail without becoming a failure.

Be careful which stories you allow to stick. The ones you repeat often enough eventually become the way you see yourself. Make sure they're telling the truth. Your mistakes are part of your story. They were never meant to become your identity.

The Next Play

I'll never forget one baseball game when I was younger. We were in the top of the seventh inning, one play away from getting out of the inning and winning the game. A routine ball was hit to me, and I dropped it. Instead of walking off the field with a win, the other team tied the game. In that moment, I was convinced I had cost my team everything.

It would have been easy to let that error become the rest of my day. I could have walked onto the field for my next at-bat thinking about the mistake instead of the opportunity standing right in front of me. That's what our minds naturally want to do. They keep replaying the last play until we miss the next one.

As I walked off the field, my coach stopped me and said something I'll never forget: "Forget about it. Don't let that be the end of your game." At the time, they were just a few encouraging words. Looking back, they became one of the most important lessons I've ever learned.

When I came up to bat later that inning, I was the sixth hitter to step to the plate. The bases were loaded, and we had another opportunity to win the game. On the first pitch I saw, I drove the ball into left-center field for the walk-off hit.

Looking back, I realize that game had very little to do with baseball. It taught me one of the most important lessons I've ever learned as an athlete: the previous play doesn't get to decide the next one unless you let it.

Sports give you that opportunity over and over again. You miss a shot, and another one comes your way. You strike out, and eventually you'll step back into the batter's box. You lose a race, and another starting line appears. The athletes who grow the most aren't the ones who never make mistakes. They're the ones who learn to be fully present for the next opportunity instead of remaining trapped in the last one.

You can't change the last play. You can't replay it, rewrite it, or pretend it never happened. What you can control is how you respond when the next opportunity arrives.

The next play has always been where growth happens. The question isn't whether you'll make mistakes, because you will. The question is whether you'll allow yesterday's mistake to steal today's opportunity.

Who You Become

At some point, every athlete's playing career comes to an end. For some, that's after high school. For others, it's after college or even years later. No matter how long you play, there will eventually be a last practice, a last game, and a final time you put on your uniform.

When that day comes, very few people will remember your statistics. They probably won't remember how many goals you scored, how many points you averaged, or how many games your team won. Those things matter while you're competing, but they were never the most valuable part of the experience.

What lasts is who you became along the way.

Sports have a way of teaching lessons that are difficult to learn anywhere else. You learn what it feels like to work for something that doesn't come easily. You learn how to handle disappointment without giving up. You learn to trust teammates, accept coaching, stay disciplined when motivation disappears, and keep showing up after failure. Those lessons don't stay on the field, the court, or the track. They become part of the way you live your life.

I've met successful adults who still talk about a coach who believed in them, a teammate who challenged them, or a lesson they learned from losing a game decades earlier. Rarely do they tell stories about the championships. They remember the moments that changed who they were.

That's why I hope you never measure your athletic career only by wins and losses. Those things matter, but they don't tell the whole story. Every practice, every setback, every early morning workout, and every challenge is shaping someone you'll become long after your playing days are over.

Whether your goal is to make varsity, earn a college scholarship, win a championship, or simply become the best athlete you can be, remember that the greatest victory isn't found on a scoreboard. It's found in the person you're becoming because you chose to keep showing up, keep learning, and keep moving forward.

One day you'll stop being known as an athlete. What you learn while you are one will stay with you for the rest of your life.

Where Do You Go From Here?

Someday, you'll play your last game.

You probably won't know it's your last one when it happens. There won't be a big announcement or a countdown. You'll simply walk off the field, the court, the track, or out of the weight room one final time, and eventually you'll realize that chapter of your life is over.

When that day comes, I hope you don't measure your athletic career only by the wins, the losses, the championships, or the statistics. Those things matter while you're competing, but they were never the reason sports became important in the first place.

I hope you remember the lessons. I hope you remember learning to trust your teammates, pushing through workouts when you didn't feel like it, responding to failure instead of running from it, and discovering that you were capable of more than you thought. I hope you remember the coaches who challenged you, the teammates who stood beside you, and the moments that changed the way you saw yourself.

Most of all, I hope you remember that every setback gave you another opportunity to choose your response. Every mistake was followed by another play. Every difficult season was followed by another chance to grow. That's true in sports, and it's true in life.

Years from now, there will still be days when things don't go your way. You'll make mistakes. You'll face disappointment. You'll wonder if you're capable of whatever challenge is standing in front of you. When those moments come, I hope you'll remember something a coach once told a young baseball player after he dropped what should have been the final out of the game.

"Forget about it. Don't let that be the end of your game."

I've carried those words with me ever since, because they were never really about baseball. They were about life.

Whatever comes next for you, don't let one mistake become your story. There is always another opportunity, another challenge, another chance to grow, and another next play.

Don't let this be the end of your game.