



**GABRIELLE REECE
ON THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF WINNING**

In Darwinian or even Donald Trump-ian terms, winning is a pretty straightforward business: The strongest, most ruthless players end up on top. This is undoubtedly why it feels better when I leap into the air and spike the volleyball versus setting it up for someone else. But I didn't always play ruthlessly, and I didn't always win. To move ahead, I first had to find out what holds people back.

During the season, I meet with a sports psychologist, Steven Sideroff, PhD, once or twice a week. Just sorting through some of my emotional baggage has been liberating. If I feel down or unmotivated, I now have some understanding of why. My personal formula for self-sabotage isn't unusual, especially among women: "You want to be liked," Sideroff tells me. "You don't want to win at someone else's expense."

When I first started playing volleyball, it was hard for me to believe I could be better than someone who had committed more time to the game. I felt guilty for my genetic gifts, like my height and my athleticism. So I'd play just hard enough to win without destroying my opponent. But opponents don't take losing any better when you go easy on them. Fortunately, really going for it feels better than being popular. I've been through phases of wanting to please all of the people all of the time. As I've grown older, I accept that it's never going to happen. It's okay to be a winner. □

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**GABRIELLE REECE
Gets Her Winner's Edge from a
Secret Source: Biofeedback**

At the upper levels of competition, all athletes have superior abilities. What separates winners from losers is the one thing that's rarely mentioned in the same sentence as the word "athletes": the brain. The great competitors understand that the mind drives emotion, stress level, concentration, and, ultimately, physical performance.

My favorite trade secret is biofeedback. When my volleyball coach, Gary Sato, first presented me with the prospect of a mental workout, I was skeptical. But surprisingly, placing my fingers on a computer-mouse-shaped device for fifteen minutes every morning and afternoon has really enhanced my playing. By measuring my body tension and making me aware of what rattles me—impending deadlines, pregame pressure—and of how that stress hurts my coordination, I can then begin to control my thoughts.

"I use monitors to feed back information," says Stephen Sideroff, Ph.D., my sports psychologist and biofeedback guru. "Athletes can actually see and hear their stress levels, so they can then make adjustments to get their mental, emotional, and physical selves in agreement." Sideroff also taught me to use breathing to calm down (mostly by relaxing my stomach muscles) and to focus on what I want to do rather than on what I didn't do.

"Using biofeedback along with visualization, athletes can better prepare for a performance," he says. "I even have them practice mentally overcoming diverse athletic scenarios, like coming back from a huge deficit. I tell them to picture themselves surmounting the obstacle and celebrating the victory. So when they actually get into the situation, they have already been through it."

In sports, as in life, the mind doesn't like unsolved business. The body will hold on to the mind's loose ends, which will resurface eventually in some form. So

if you have unresolved issues, you have to face them. It's nice to have a machine that forces you to do just that. □

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