

“THIS CUTTING-EDGE BOOK IS OUR FUTURE”

- Anson Dorrance, UNC Soccer Head Coach, 22 National Championships

# WHAT DRIVES WINNING



Building Character Gets Results. Here's How.

**BRETT LEDBETTER**

*An excerpt from the chapter:*

**Courageous**

## The Courage Zone

Anything outside of your comfort zone is what we call the courage zone.

Anytime you get out of your comfort zone, what happens?

Your comfort zone stretches.



## Option 1 or Option 2

What prevents people from getting out of their comfort zone? Fear. The fear is tied to the outcome and all of the things that come with the outcome.

I was talking with a player named Tyler about this. He told me that he was playing tentatively. We started to explore why:

Me: Why are you playing tentatively?

Tyler: Every time I make a mistake my coach takes me out.

Me: So you play tentatively so you don't make mistakes?

Tyler: Yes.

I gave Tyler two options to choose from:

Option 1: Go all-in. Risk being taken out of the game for the chance to be great.

Option 2: Eliminate the chance of being great by playing tentatively and not getting taken out of the game.

He said, “When you put it like that—option 1. I never thought about it like that.”

Can you relate to that? Tyler was blinded by fear. In his case, he was afraid of being taken out of the game. The fear was getting in the way of him being great. In order for us to be all that we can be we have to learn how to put fear in second place. I showed Tyler something that we did with a soccer team.

## **Playing Free**

I was working with the University of Florida’s soccer team and their head coach, Becky Burleigh. One of the things we emphasized leading up to the Elite 8 was that we really wanted the players to play free. Playing free means not tightening up, which is really tough for players when there’s a lot on the line. We’ve found that when there’s more on the line, that feeling of anxiety gets even more intense.

One of the things that makes post-season soccer interesting is it’s played outdoors. Weather conditions aren’t predictable. The University of Wisconsin played a post-season game with two-and-a-half inches of snow on the ground.

We showed pictures of that game to the team to help them understand that we have to be ready for anything. Obviously these aren’t ideal weather conditions for a sport that requires you to pass the ball on the ground.

We then showed the team a picture taken at Winthrop University with puddles all over the field. Again, not the best conditions to pass a ball on the ground. After showing the

team the picture at Winthrop, we put a picture of one of Florida's former players on the screen:



Shana is the player pictured in this photo. We said to the team, “This is what it looks like to go all-in.” We then asked them to think of a stoplight. We said, “This is what the color green looks like.”

We then asked, “If this is what green looks like, what does yellow look like?”

The team described yellow as, “Playing cautious, taking less risks and playing timid.”

The team made a goal: “play green” for each other.

## **Play Green**

Before practice that day, we gave them Green Packages that contained 2 green wristbands. Everybody wore them as a visual reminder to each other to “play green.” The goal: anybody

who feels like they are going yellow, there are visual reminders everywhere to “play green.”

The green wristbands gave everybody the reminder of the courage needed to chase the win, not avoid the loss. Was it effective? Fast forward to the Elite 8 game against Stanford.

Stanford was a number-one seed and they gave up two goals *the entire season* on their home field. They scored 34. That means the score on their field was 34-2. Within the first couple of minutes Stanford scores. You can imagine what most teams would feel in this moment.

We film the bench—it helps us coach everybody and it also allows us to see who is a great teammate. We caught the bench after the first goal. They were holding up their green wristbands to visually remind the team to reset and “go all-in.” It was amazing.

We scored within 5 minutes.

They scored again.

We scored again.

Soccer is interesting because it’s the only sport where you can tie and not move on. Stanford advanced in a penalty kick shootout. In the press conference after the game Becky said, “This was the most fulfilling year I’ve ever coached. It was amazing to see the players grow over the course of the year.”

That team set the standard for what it means to “go all-in.” We decided at the end of the year that we were going to embed this into the culture moving forward. Here are the designs of

the jerseys for next year.



Notice the green dot on the shoulder. Now every time each player puts her jersey on, there is a visual reminder about what we are about. We “play green” for each other. I’ve presented this idea to a lot of teams across all sports and there seems to be a universal application. Players have told me that they draw a green circle (in the shape of a stoplight) on their wrist to help them reset.

One swimmer told me that she painted her toenails green as a visual reminder to “go all-in” right before she hit the water. The last thing swimmers see before they dive into the pool is their feet.

## **Back to Tyler**

After I presented what I did with the University of Florida’s soccer team to Tyler, I asked him, “What do you think about that?”

He said, “I like the idea.”

Me: How could you use it?

Tyler: I can draw a green dot on my arm sleeve that I wear.

Me: How would you use it?

Tyler: If I start to play yellow I can look at the green dot to reset. It's a reminder for me to stay aggressive.

Tyler had a game a few days later. He missed two free throws late in the game. That's a tough spot to be in. He bounced back from those two free throws without getting down, and on the next offensive possession he delivered a game-winning play.

After the post-game press conference, Tyler's coach said, "I was proud. I could see Tyler's body language was good after the two free throws. I watched him try to gather and regroup himself. I'm glad he did that. He kept us in the game."

I sent Tyler a text with the newspaper article in it. He sent me a text back saying, "The green dot really helped me!"

Find this book, videos and more at  
**WHATDRIVESWINNING.COM**