

# CHAMPION ATHLETE'S HANDBOOK

*416 Lessons for Success  
and Fulfillment in Sports...and Life*

JON UNGER



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and Fulfillment in Sports...and Life**

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<http://www.champathlete.com>

Dedicated to the player I call “5”—Nolan Bowers—who represents all a coach could look for in a champion. Dedicated to Coach Jim Reynolds, Coach Jeff Chambers, and Coach Sonny Tudor who have done so much in helping me strive to be a championship coach. Dedicated to my parents who have done all they could to help me act like a champion in my personal life and everyday actions.

# FOREWORD

Possibly the most influential event of my life occurred when I was a 6-year old first grader. My high school won the state football championship. I was in awe of the all-state split end who lived on my street, and I can remember the excitement I felt when he signed an autograph for me. At that point, there was nothing I wanted more than to win a state championship myself when I was in high school.

As determined as I was, I was unsuccessful in accomplishing my dream. My best chance occurred in my junior year when I played on an outstanding soccer team which was disqualified from the state tournament for playing an ineligible player. I felt great pain upon seeing the state championship game where a team we had beaten in the pre-season beat a team we had beaten in the regular season. I wrote my college personal statement about this disappointment, and the perspective it gave me on athletic participation. I had no regrets about the effort I had given. I had no regrets about the relationships I made with both teammates and coaches. I had no regrets about the values I believe so strongly which the pursuit of a state championship helped produce in me.

I went to college at Harvard, and from there, to Harvard Law School thinking that my career in high school athletics was nothing more than a flood of mostly fond

memories. Yet, I remained obsessed with sports to the point where my classmates would joke that I was much better suited to be a coach than a lawyer. I ignored them. But on my first day of working at a law firm in the summer before my final year of law school, I came to the realization that if I did not quit immediately, I was destined to become a lawyer—something I did not want to be. I graduated from law school, passed the bar, and then went straight to education school. Today, I am a high school teacher and coach.

I still hold the dream of being part of a state championship team. Only now, I am responsible for building that dream in others. I write this book in the hopes that I can help as many kids as I can develop the qualities of a champion, both on the playing field and in their personal lives.

August 1st, 1999

# INTRODUCTION

When I wrote this book (and the above “Foreword”) five years ago, I had no idea that I was heading into a nightmare of a coaching season. It seemed like just about anything that could go wrong, did. My team was hit by an astonishing number of injuries, and we barely managed to scrape out a .500 record. We got knocked out of the tournament in an embarrassing early-round blowout to a team we had beaten 6-0 the year before. When I announced at our team banquet that our program’s goal remained to win the State Championship, there were more than a few rolled eyeballs (some by my own assistant coaches). The truth of the matter is that another season like that one probably would have cut short my career as a head coach.

The next season started off just as poorly. We lost three of our first five games. The first loss was an embarrassment that we gave away after outplaying our opponent. We were dominated in our second loss. We gave everything we could in our third loss (in overtime). I could live with that one, and I don’t think it’s any coincidence that that game turned our season around. The boys began to realize that how they played the game mattered far more than the results.

A couple weeks later, we found ourselves behind 4-0 in the first half to the defending State Champions. The other team was laughing and having a grand time.

But we didn't quit. And in the second half we cut the lead to 4-3 before being forced to accept loss number four. We didn't lose again the rest of the regular season.

We won our first tournament game easily. Our second tourney game saw us come from behind in the second half to defeat the team that had beaten us in overtime. Game number three saw us behind with under ten minutes to play. A miraculous goal tied the game. A penalty kick with less than a minute to play won us our first District Championship. Our next game—in the state's sweet sixteen—put us against the defending State Champs. Again we fell behind. Again we came back. Again we won in the second half. We fell behind in our next game, too, only to come back and win the Regional Championship in overtime! We were in the State Final Four.

Just when I thought we might win the 2000 State Championship, the wheels came off. We got pounded in the State Semi-Finals, 4-0, by a team from Columbus. That loss was tough to take, particularly after reading their comments about us in the next day's papers. Our team was even better in 2001 and made it back to the final 8 in Ohio before losing to the eventual State Champions, Springfield Catholic Central.

We returned a lot for 2002, but so did Springfield Catholic. We were ranked #1 (us) and #2 (them) in the state when we met in a Regional Final rematch. We won 2-1. I couldn't have been more excited. But our next foe was our Columbus nem-



esis from the 2000 State Semis. I read their media comments from that game back to our team. No more motivation was needed. But I thought we were done when we fell behind 2-1 in the second half (we had never been losing all season). We tied the game at 2. I knew we were done when we fell behind 3-2. We tied it up again at three. When all was said and done, we won the thriller 5-4.

Friday, November 8th, 2002 found us in the State Championship game. A combination of fatigue, a huge field, and a very strong opponent found us on our heels for the first time of the year. We couldn't score, but neither could our opponents. We went to a penalty kick shootout. By the grace of God, we won 5-4. We ended the season 23-0-0—the first undefeated-untied boys soccer team in Ohio since 1993. More importantly, we had won the State Championship!

We lost a lot heading into 2003, but the returning seniors were a special group. More than any boys I have ever coached, these boys believed in me and my philosophies. Throughout the season, they would remind me of instructions from this book. We had some bumps along the road, tying a couple games (we pulled out one in the final minute). We had to win one early tournament game in overtime. We had to come from behind in the Regional Finals. The State Semi-Finals saw us fall behind again to our old foe from Columbus. But as we had the year before, we came back to win...this time 3-2. And on Friday, November 7th, 2003 we won another State

Championship! Our 46-game unbeaten streak set a record for boys soccer in Ohio.

The 2004 team was not nearly as talented as its immediate predecessors. We battled and competed well to earn an 8-4-4 regular season record. In the tournament, we scratched and clawed our way to another District Title, winning the championship game in another shootout. The boys truly believed they could win another State Championship, and we played our next game into two overtimes...before losing in sudden death. Seeing that ball hit our net brought indescribable shock and disappointment. But the way our boys responded to the loss brought me nothing but pride. They didn't point fingers. They didn't make excuses. They didn't carry on with histrionics. They congratulated their opponents and wished them well (ultimately they lost 1-0 in the State Finals). Then, our boys hugged each other and made it known how much they cared about being teammates together. A coaching colleague of mine always says at the end of a season: "Don't be sad that it's over. Be happy that it happened." This team embodied that quote. I couldn't have been more proud.

You're not always going to win. And you may never win that final game. But that's not what matters in the end. What matters is how you act and react to the situations that confront you both in athletics and in life. What matters is that you conduct yourself like a champion.

This book is newly dedicated to all those boys and coaches of the Madeira Mustangs boys soccer team who have brought pride to our program by conducting themselves as champions...on and off the field. It is my hope that our future teams will again be raising State Championship trophies in Columbus, but my bigger dream is that the players I'm associated with will help build champions of their own as they move on in the world.

December 5th, 2004

- #1 Nod to your coach when you understand what he/she is saying, whether you agree with him/her or not.
- #2 Always be the first to congratulate a teammate when he/she makes a successful play.
- #3 Point at your teammate who sets you up to score with a nice pass or some other underrecognized play.
- #4 Never criticize a teammate.
- #5 Always help a teammate up who has fallen to the ground.

- #6 Get in the best condition you possibly can so that you can perform at your highest level with your greatest confidence.
- #7 Always chase after balls going out of bounds.
- #8 Never express disappointment towards or argue with an official.
- #9 Treat every practice as if it's a championship game.
- #10 Never underestimate an opponent.

#11

Never quit in the middle  
of a play and never give  
up before a game is over.

- #12 Always know the score and how much time is left in a period.
- #13 Keep sight of the ball 99.9% of the time.
- #14 Visualize yourself making successful plays.
- #15 Keep in mind that truly great players make the players around them better.
- #16 Write thank-you notes to coaches at the end of the season.

- #17 Read anything you can about your sport.
- #18 Be an extra pair of eyes for your teammates—talk on the field.
- #19 Be an active watcher when you watch your sport on tv—pay close attention to how the best players play (especially those who play your position).
- #20 Acknowledge your family, friends, and schoolmates from the court or field upon winning a championship—it will make the moment all the more magical and memorable for both you and them.



#21

Always be a good sport—  
memories of how you  
act last a lot longer than  
whether you won or lost  
the game.

- #22 Never dwell on a mistake in the middle of a game—you may miss your opportunity to make up for it.
- #23 Never trash-talk to an opponent—keep your mind on the game and your performance.
- #24 Ignore opponents who try distracting you with trash-talk—don't let them decrease your focus on the task at hand.
- #25 Realize that it's often better to be good at many aspects of your sport than to be great at one.

- #26 “Be quick but don’t hurry.” (John Wooden)
- #27 John Wooden notes that the team which makes the most mistakes will likely be the victor.
- #28 Anticipate with a purpose—anticipate opportunities which you can take advantage of rather than situations which make no difference.
- #29 Understand the nuances of your sport’s game clock—learn how to save and waste time. Know how to take advantage of time-outs.

#30

Never stop thinking of  
ways and experimenting  
with ways to make tiny  
improvements in  
your game.

- #31 Treat underclassmen with respect when you are an upperclassman—they will be eternally grateful for your kindness.
- #32 Encourage the players who lag behind and place last in team conditioning—they are often in great need of appreciation and acceptance.
- #33 Don't get over-excited when you make a great play—act like you've done it before and plan on doing it again.

#34 Before you make a poor personal decision, keep in mind that you are probably a hero and a role model for somebody younger than you.#35 Never take pride in injuring an opponent.

#36 Never intentionally try to hurt an opponent.

#37 Get up as quickly as you possibly can after getting knocked down—the easiest time to fight off a potential injury is in the first few seconds.

#38 Get to practice early.

#39

Work on some part of  
your game in the minutes  
before practice—don't  
waste the valuable time.

- #40 Do sit-ups daily—conditioning starts in the stomach.
- #41 Take care of your class work.
- #42 Get at least 8 hours of sleep every night.
- #43 When a situation is grim and the breaks are going against you, do not show exasperation—dig in and give encouragement to your teammates by clenching your fists and saying, “Let’s go!”



- #44 Come up with and use well-meaning nicknames for your teammates.
- #45 Take good care of your feet—leave no wrinkles in your socks, tie your shoes tightly, and double-knot your laces.
- #46 Wear a stocking hat in the winter-time and other periods of cold weather.
- #47 Set up and play in pick-up games in the off-season—play for keeps every time.

#48

Keep in mind that no coach will ever cut the hardest working player on the field or court.

#49 Make your weaknesses your strengths.

#50 Keep an athletic journal.

#51 Write down a list of goals—check it and update it every once in a while.

#52 Do not make excuses.

#53 Never put down an opponent—before, during, or after a game (especially to the media).

- #54 Congratulate an opponent after he/she has defeated you—use the lessons from defeat to become a stronger player.
- #55 Never talk back to the person who washes your uniforms.
- #56 Experiment with something new whenever you play a pick-up game.
- #57 Never let the weather prevent you from practicing.

#58

Question yourself—  
never be satisfied  
with your current  
performance level.

#59 Play with kids who are older and better than you.#60 Learn all the angles of your game.

#61 Ask your coach questions.

#62 Know the rules of your game inside-out.

#63 Pay attention when your coach is talking—you should look him/her in the eyes.

#64 Be grateful for the opportunity to be a player—it's a privilege, not a right, and so many people would love to be in your shoes.

#65 When running sprints, always touch the line and run through the finish.

#66 Be modest.

#67 Say “thank you” when a fan gives you praise.

#68 Never take advantage of your status as an athlete.

#69 Be alert for loose balls.

#70 Play hard until you hear the whistle.

#71

Always believe  
you can win.



#72 Keep in mind the thought that champions never lose games...they just run out of time.

#73 Run on and off the field.

#74 Care more about the team's performance than your personal performance.

#75 Be imaginative.

#76 Get a personal pre-game routine.

#77 Realize that it's better to play well and lose to a stronger opponent than to play poorly and defeat a weaker one.

#78 Pursue excellence, not results—the results will follow.

#79 There is no such thing as a “gimme”—never take anything for granted.

#80 Develop your weaker side.

#81 Attend your friends' and schoolmates' games.

#82

Treat all your  
coaches with  
deference and respect.

#83 Don't take coaching as criticism.

#84 Learn from your mistakes.

#85 Don't showboat.

#86 Work hard on perfecting a trick play.

#87 Run your pattern or lane hard, even if you are not the primary option.

#88 Always drink lots of water.

- #89 Show appreciation for the band and cheerleaders.
- #90 When you play pick-up games, take your younger brother or sister with you.
- #91 Become as fast as your possibly can—there is no substitute for speed.
- #92 Find a place where you can practice after dark.
- #93 Know the responsibilities of each position on the field.

#94

Try to learn your  
opponent's strengths  
as quickly as possible.

#95 Try to learn your opponent's weaknesses as quickly as possible.

#96 Know the scouting report.

#97 Be ready to ditch the scouting report when it is wrong.

#98 Be ready before you have to be ready, especially when a ball is about to be put into play.

#99 Play in an athletic stance.

#100 Practice a skill on your own before you use it in competition.

#101 Know your teammates' strengths.

#102 Know your teammates' weaknesses.

#103 Pass the ball to the side away from the defense.

#104 Pass the ball to your teammate's stronger side.

#105 Don't show up the ref.



#106  
Don't show up  
your coach.

#107 Don't show up your teammate.

#108 Learn how to pass the ball to your teammate so that he can do something with it quickly and easily.

#109 Know areas in you game where you can surprise your opponent.

#110 Learn proper technique as early as possible.

#111 Take pride in your defense.

#112 Be enthusiastic—it's contagious.

#113 Work hard on your ability to score during the off-season.

#114 Lead by example.

#115 Find a (windowless) wall to practice on.

#116 Stay emotionally balanced—don't get too high when things are going well or too low when things are going poorly.

*#117*

*Keep your head up.*

#118 Assume your opponent is right-handed until he/she shows otherwise.

#119 Get involved with a youth team in your neighborhood in any way you can be helpful.

#120 Be willing to take the last shot.

#121 While playing, always be aware of where your best player is.

#122 While playing, always be aware of where your opponent's best player is.

#123 Understand that the type of shoes you wear doesn't make you a good athlete.

#124 Do it now because you won't want to do it later.

#125 Learn how to defend players without the ball—this will be your defensive situation a large majority of the time.

#126 Realize that everyone is capable of being a good defensive player...and a good offensive player is capable of being a great defensive player.

#127

Watch game tape  
of yourself and  
your opponents.

#128 Watch game tape looking for ways to improve.

#129 Instruct a teammate on what to do before something bad happens...but not after.

#130 Know when to be serious.

#131 Try to make your teammates look good.

#132 Compliment your coach.



#133 Eat light before a game, and never use what you ate before a game as an excuse for poor performance.

#134 Wink or smile at a teammate when the game is at its most critical moment.

#135 Understand the rules for every line on your court or field.

#136 Go the extra mile...literally.

#137 Have interests outside of athletics.

#138

Organize team activities  
outside of the sport.

#139 Appreciate the ability to score “ugly”—try to master this yourself, no matter how skilled you are.

#140 Be consistent.

#141 Learn how to play numbers down offensively and defensively.

#142 Learn how to play numbers up offensively and defensively.

#143 Become a complete player.

#144 Play your best at whatever position the coach puts you.

#145 Know your role on the team.

#146 Accept your role on the team.

#147 Look for ways to improve your team's chemistry.

#148 Keep in mind that there's no "I" in team.

#149 Learn the history of your sport.

#150  
Hang with  
the good crowd.

#151 Don't ever think that you are better than you are.

#152 Don't brag about your team..especially before the season is over.

#153 Know what you are capable of doing.

#154 Know your limitations.

#155 Make up your own unique conditioning drills.

#156 Try to get a little better every day.

#157 Don't be afraid to fail.

#158 Practice celebrating a victory.

#159 Imagine your team winning the championship game.

#160 Don't forget the taste of defeat.

#161 Enjoy success...but not too much and not for too long.

#162 Remember that a 10,000 mile journey begins with the first step.

#163

Believe in miracles,  
but don't  
depend on them.



#164 Earn your teammates' respect.

#165 Be tough.

#166 Show class.

#167 Follow all shots—on offense and defense.

#168 Learn how to short-hop a ball.

#169 Always be willing to try a new technique, play, or skill.

#170 Realize that nothing comes easy.

#171 Be happy that nothing comes easy.

#172 Understand that the harder you work at something, the more difficult it is to surrender.

#173 Don't overestimate your opponent.

#174 Recognize whether the next player coming into the play is a teammate or an opponent.

#175 Stretch.

#176  
Lift weights  
with correct form.

#177 Know that somewhere someone is working harder than you.

#178 Dream big dreams.

#179 Leave the court or field on a good note...like swishing your last basketball shot.

#180 Teach your sport to somebody.

#181 Make efforts to make your teammates who play the least feel like important members of the team.

#182 Create a team celebratory dance.

#183 Learn how to play with every part of your body.

#184 Find a role model.

#185 Visualize yourself being successful right before falling asleep.

#186 Don't ever play for money (i.e. don't bet on your games).

#187 Do what you have to do deserve success.

#188  
Strive to be  
an “overachiever.”

#189 Know the differences in how to defend in different parts of the field.

#190 Make up and play games combining your sports with other sports.

#191 Practice with a handicap.

#192 Don't be jealous of other people's success—try to learn from it.

#193 Do first what you want to do least.

#194 Don't stand still.

#195 Be quick to convert from offense to defense when your team loses the ball.

#196 Be quick to convert from defense to offense when your team wins the ball.

#197 When talking to the press, compliment your teammates and your opponents.

#198 Thank those who help you.



**#199**  
**Have a killer instinct.**

#200 Bury an opponent while you can.

#201 Don't ever take easy scoring opportunities for granted (even in a pick-up game)—if you take them seriously on the playground, you will always convert in competition.

#202 Exercise you peripheral vision.

#203 Be ready before your opponent is.

#204 See the entire field.

#205 When defending, try to force your opponent to look down from your pressure.

#206 Compete in everything you do.

#207 Watch the Olympics.

#208 Watch the celebration when a team or individual wins a championship.

#209 Find a way to make plays.

#210

Learn how to make  
plays on defense  
as well as offense.

#211 Ask someone more experienced and/or talented than you how to do something—that is, learn from people better than you.

#212 Know the phone number of your coach and all your teammates.

#213 Call somebody if you are at all uncertain about what time to be at a practice or a game.

#214 Watch highlights of your sport.

#215 Never say “I can’t”—instead, say “I can’t...yet.”

#216 Work on your lateral quickness.

#217 Work on your backwards speed.

#218 Work on your ability to stop and change direction.

#219 Work on your acceleration.

#220 Find a nice hill to work on.

#221 Realize that one of the greatest reasons for playing is the friendships you will make for life.

*#222*  
Be fundamental.

#223 Learn the fundamentals.

#224 Learn the work-outs and demands of players at the next level.

#225 Don't let the referee determine the outcome of the game.

#226 Play every game as if it is your last.

#227 Understand the different philosophies on how to play your sport.



#228 Never boo at a game.

#229 Dominate the loose balls.

#230 Work on your first step.

#231 Seek advice on your footwork—there is almost certainly some aspect of it you can improve.

#232 Realize the power of self-fulfilling prophecy—if you can picture something and believe it can happen, it will!

**#233**

**Get a favorite team.**

#234 Get a favorite player.

#235 Get a favorite coach.

#236 Keep your shirt tucked in.

#237 Don't ever try to separate yourself from the team.

#238 Thank your teammates when you earn an individual honor.

#239 Make plays from behind the play.

- #240 Ask someone who has won a championship to describe the experience.
- #241 Believe the magic of being part of something bigger than yourself.
- #242 Realize that a game will usually be decided by only 3 plays (and you never know when those plays will occur!)—players who play their hardest all the time will always be ready for them.
- #243 Learn how to perform tricks with the ball.

#244

Play in the rain  
(but not in the lightning).

- #245 Understand that many athletes who have had the good fortune of winning a championship look back at it as one of the greatest experiences of their lives.
- #246 Give your championship ring, medal, trophy, or plaque to your parents or someone else who made it possible.
- #247 Be a part of team celebrations.
- #248 Always put your hand in the team huddle.

#249 Follow through.

#250 Be willing to take a chance.

#251 Learn how to protect the ball with your body.

#252 Take pride in being a good sport.

#253 Knock an underdog out early—the longer it hangs around, the more confident it becomes.

#254 Don't cheat in practice—earn a reputation with your teammates for your honesty and integrity.

*#255*

*Appreciate when your  
coach gets on you—  
he/she may have given up  
on you otherwise.*



#256 Never quit defending just because you have been beaten on a play—your opponent needs to know that you are relentless and are chasing after him/her.

#257 Concentrate.

#258 Attack pressure.

#259 Find a way.

#260 Never give up hope.

#261 Have fun.

#262 Overcome adversity.

#263 Be a part of the solution...not the problem.

#264 Always know that your next shot is going in.

#265 Swim to get in great condition.

#266 Do toe raises in your spare time.

## #267

Learn which direction to play the ball so that good things might happen even if you don't do exactly what you wanted to do (i.e. hitting a ball to the right side of the infield can move a runner from second to third; shooting a soccer ball wide of the far post can lead to a goal off a rebound).

#268 When you lose the ball on a turnover, explode to win it back immediately as that is the easiest time to win it back.

#269 Don't be afraid to speak up.

#270 Dig deep—you will be surprised what you are capable of.

#271 Never lose sight of the final goal.

#272 Learn how to use an opponent's momentum against him/her.

#273 Stay in on school nights.

#274 Keep it simple.

#275 If your coach's mom or dad comes to a practice or game, make him or her feel welcome.

#276 Understand that your coach has your team's best interests in mind.

#277 Realize that the game tape doesn't lie.

#278

If you have a lucky number,  
try to get it as your jersey  
number...otherwise, try to get  
the jersey number of one of  
your favorite players.

- #279 Upon graduation, express your wish for a rising underclassman to wear your number.
- #280 Expect the unexpected.
- #281 Realize that good defense leads to good offense.
- #282 Be careful about your assumptions.
- #283 Don't ball watch and spectate—you should always be moving to improve your position on the field.
- #284 Create your own special training music mix tape.

#285 Don't be obsessed with your individual statistics.

#286 Don't watch so much tv.

#287 Watch HOOSIERS once a year.

#288 Don't blame others for your mistakes.

#289 Perfect a go-to move.

#290 Perfect a counter to your go-to move.



#291

Realize that perfect  
practice makes perfect.

#292 Learn how to put effective spin on the ball.

#293 Learn how to read a ball's spin.

#294 Protect your privates.

#295 Learn how to communicate to a teammate with your eyes.

#296 Learn where to move without the ball.

#297 Take advantage of your opponent's blind spot.

#298 Play on your toes.

#299 Take pictures of your teammates and team experiences.

#300 Make the best of all situations.

#301 Play different sports.

#302 Play something at all times of the year.

#303 Play a lot of 1-on-1.

#304

Try to be a coach  
on the field.

#305 Play every day.

#306 Be positive.

#307 Sometimes practice with imaginary balls.

#308 Be patient.

#309 Overtrain in the off-season—that's the time to exhaust yourself.

#310 Learn how to perform skills in all directions.

#311 Work on your touch.

#312 Receive the ball in a way that you can do something with it.

#313 Learn what calls a referee is more or less likely to make in different parts of the field and how this should affect the way you play.

#314 Learn how to use your body for positioning.

#315 Learn the truisms and cliches of your game.

#316

With good defensive pressure, make your opponent turn his back towards the direction his team is going.

#317 Know that you are ultimately going to be successful.

#318 Watch your future opponent's games in person (even better when done with teammates).

#319 Recognize when an opponent will have difficulty receiving a ball—this is an ideal time to overwhelm him with your defensive pressure.

#320 Watch BRIAN'S SONG.



#321 Realize that in many sports, it can be easier to score through your defense than through your offense.

#322 Make fakes on defense as well as offense.

#323 Wear down your opponent and be prepared to take advantage of them when they are worn down.

#324 Get prepared for next year, this year.

#325 Realize that you need to have an enthusiastic, supportive bench to have a great team.

#326

Make your opponent  
think more than he/she  
wants to think.

#327 Do something extra after you have exhausted yourself—that's how you develop your best condition, your toughness, and your will.

#328 Hustle to be the last line of defense.

#329 Be loyal.

#330 Do sprints after playing in the off-season.

#331 Never apologize for not using drugs or alcohol.

#332 Refuse to care about what other people say about you for not using drugs and alcohol.

#333 Don't curse.

#334 Prove you deserve more playing time by outworking people in practice and in the off-season.

#335 Give rides to younger teammates.

#336 Don't haze teammates.

#337 Maintain great condition throughout the year.

#338

Don't believe everything  
you read in the  
newspapers.

#339 Don't compare scores.

#340 Don't second-guess coaches' strategic decisions.

#341 Give useful observations to your coach.

#342 Talk out your disagreements with your coach privately after practice.

#343 Don't make enemies—they are a waste of time.

#344 Make up ground quickly while the ball is in the air.

#345 Accept apologies.

#346 Tell your parents you love them.

#347 Respect proven winners.

#348 Don't gamble.

#349 Pay attention to details.

#350 Don't be beaten by the same move twice.

#351

Look people in the eye  
when you speak to them.



#352 Make your opponent do what he or she doesn't want to do.

#353 Realize that the key is not that you don't fall down but that you get up when you do fall down.

#354 Find ways to bond with your teammates off the field.

#355 When a ball goes out of bounds, never act like the ball has gone off you or your teammates.

#356 Double-check that you have all equipment and the proper uniform before you leave for the game.

#357 Bring water.

#358 When you visit another school, look at the banners, pictures, and trophies recognizing championship teams.

#359 Be a threat on offense.

#360 Try to win sprints.

#361

Call your coach by  
the title and name he  
wants to be called by.

#362 Take advantage of extra opportunities to play.

#363 Realize that games are often won and lost in the first five and last five minutes of a half.

#364 Compliment a rising player who may one day be at your level.

#365 Share a laugh with a referee.

#366 Hang on just a little longer—it's often the difference between victory and defeat.

- #367 Ask your coach what you have to do to get better in the off-season.
- #368 Race through your own obstacle courses—keep track of your records.
- #369 Get a training partner.
- #370 When people predict that you will fail, use their lack of faith to inspire you.
- #371 Concentrate on being the best that you can be.

#372

Realize that it's more  
important to be a great  
person than a great player.

#373 Work so hard that in your heart of hearts you know that you deserve championships.

#374 Give credit to your opponents.

#375 Give credit to your teammates.

#376 Give credit to your coach.

#377 Never blame referees for a loss.

#378 Never blame weather conditions for a loss.

#379 Bring lots of water to practice and games.

#380 Remember that attitudes are more important than facts.

#381 Thank the trainer.

#382 Learn how to deflect a ball to a teammate.

#383 Dedicate a season to someone important.



#384

When a teammate is out because of sickness or injury, write his/her name on your shoe to show he/she is with you.

#385 Slap hands with a teammate you are subbing for.

#386 Slap hands with a teammate who is subbing for you.

#387 When you are on the bench, give some positive words to a teammate who is returning to the bench.

#388 Never blame teammates for a loss.

#389 Realize that there is always a solution.

- #390 Act in a moral way off the field—you will feel better, sleep better, and perform better on the field.
- #391 Believe you are going to win the state championship.
- #392 Expect the best and get it.
- #393 Be alert for unusual passes.
- #394 Learn how to recognize opponents in dangerous areas.

#395

Learn what passes and plays are too risky in the defensive end of the field.

- #396 Learn how to most effectively recover defensively when an opponent has beaten you.
- #397 Learn how to cut opponents off when you have a breakaway.
- #398 Contain the ball when you are numbers down.
- #399 Learn how to take advantage of give-and-gos.
- #400 Learn many, many moves.

#401 Enjoy the feeling of physical exhaustion—it makes your body stronger.

#402 Learn the situations where different moves work best.

#403 Learn how to touch-pass a ball.

#404 Learn how to take advantage of shot fakes.

#405 Learn how to scan the field as a pass is traveling towards you.

#406

Learn the most risk-free  
ways to break up a play.

- #407 Pass the ball to an open teammate early—don't let a defender get there.
- #408 Always be working to improve passing angles when you are supporting the man with the ball.
- #409 Time your runs into scoring areas—don't get there too early, but don't get there too late.
- #410 Learn how to score as many different ways as you can.



- #411 When possible, get the ball to a teammate when you break up a play with your defense.
- #412 Make sure to keep yourself in the play if you gamble for a steal.
- #413 When you are injured, try to improve a skill unaffected by the injury.
- #414 Never underestimate the heart of a champion.
- #415 It's the journey, not the destination.

#416

Keep in mind that no matter  
how you perform at the  
critical moment of the game,  
whether you succeed or fail,  
your parents will still love you.

# CONCLUSION

If I have learned one valuable lesson in athletics and in life, it is that we have far greater control over our destinies than we can possibly perceive or imagine. The power of faith and desire is enormous and can overcome the most daunting of obstacles. I wish you all the best in your pursuit of whatever championships you might seek, and I hope your dreams come true. But should your endeavor fall short of your dreams, I hope you will have the wisdom to realize that any time you have poured your entire heart into something and truly given your best, by all rights you are a champion—just as surely as if you wear the gold medal or raise the winner’s trophy.

I would enjoy learning about your future successes. And if you have any additions for the Champion Athlete’s Handbook, I would be most appreciative if you would pass them along to me for future editions. Godspeed to you.

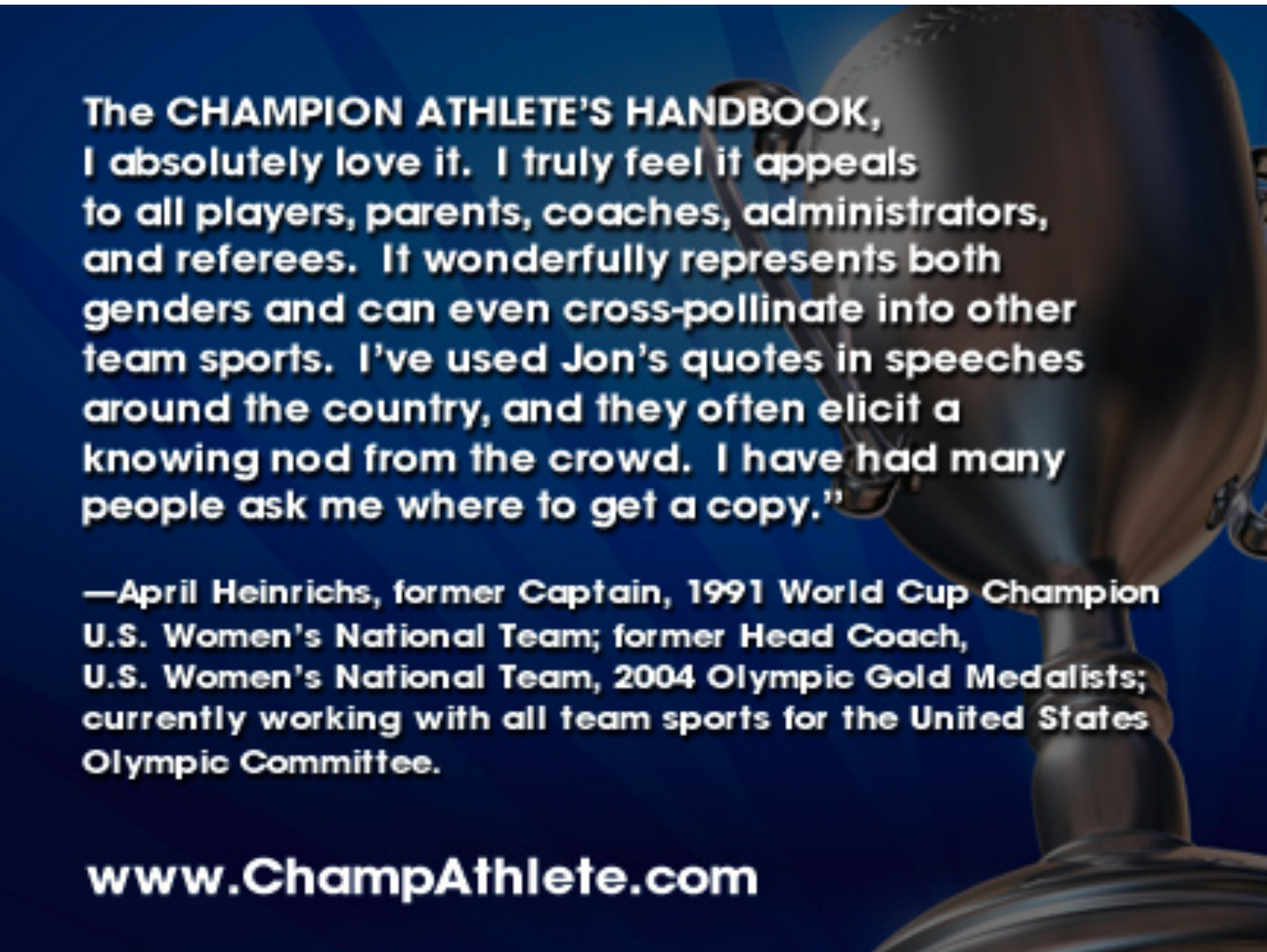
Sincerely,

Jon Unger

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# ABOUT JON UNGER

Jon Unger graduated from Harvard College in 1992. Upon graduating from Harvard Law School in 1995, he became a teacher and coach at Madeira High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. As head boys varsity soccer coach, Unger's soccer program has been among Ohio's best over the past decade, culminating with State Championships in 2002 and 2003...Ohio's only back-to-back undefeated seasons in its history of boys soccer. As proud as he is of his team's success, Unger takes greater pride in how his players have conducted themselves on the field and have developed as all-around citizens. He is married to Melissa, also a teacher, and they have recently had the blessing of a son, William. Unger has hopes that some day William will model the lessons of this book.



**The CHAMPION ATHLETE'S HANDBOOK, I absolutely love it. I truly feel it appeals to all players, parents, coaches, administrators, and referees. It wonderfully represents both genders and can even cross-pollinate into other team sports. I've used Jon's quotes in speeches around the country, and they often elicit a knowing nod from the crowd. I have had many people ask me where to get a copy."**

**—April Heinrichs, former Captain, 1991 World Cup Champion U.S. Women's National Team; former Head Coach, U.S. Women's National Team, 2004 Olympic Gold Medalists; currently working with all team sports for the United States Olympic Committee.**

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