

THE NEXT PLAY™

The Self Factor:
Igniting Women Athletes to Reach
Their Full Potential

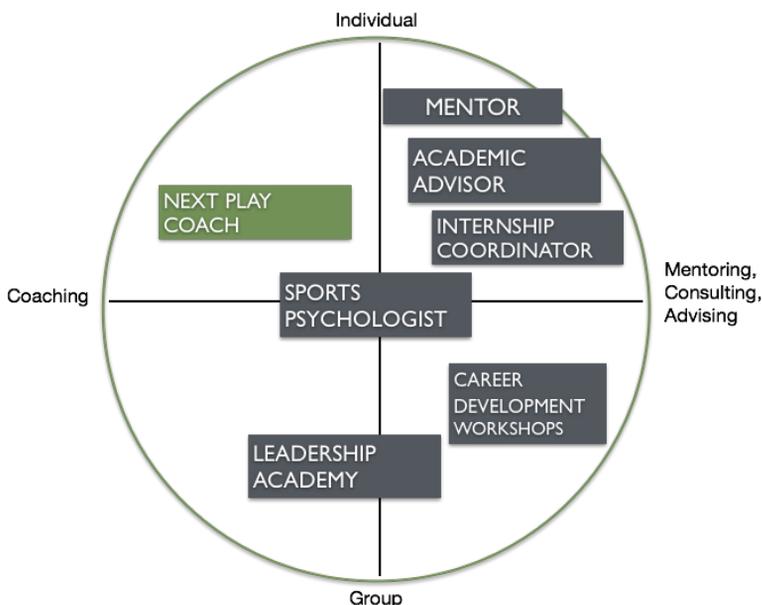
Intro

Two years ago, we set out to answer the question: How can we better equip today's women athletes to confidently and boldly embrace their roles as the next generation of leaders?

We've learned that the answer to this question is the Self Factor: the belief that individual development is paramount to team, group, and societal success. And the knowledge that true leadership is about each individual woman having the confidence to raise her hand, the boldness to make her voice heard, and the vision to make intentional and individual choices about her life and career.

In the time that's followed, we've worked intensively with college and professional women athletes, and have discovered what we believe to be a missing, yet essential, link in their development: one-on-one leadership coaching.

Sure, athletes have a wide variety of support available to them, but somehow the sum of these services still misses the mark. What's missing? Individual support that speaks to the *heart of the person*, not just their game.



The Next Play provides individualized service while supporting more effective use of existing programs.

Coaching fills the void in individualized, personal development and is often the catalyst for athletes to be more effective in how they use other services.

The Next Play opens a door for an athlete's whole identity to emerge, rooting her development in a deep sense of purpose and meaning that is fundamental to current and future success. The results, described by participants, are undeniably profound:

“

One of the most rewarding experiences of my college career.

You cannot get this personal experience anywhere else.

Life changing.

”



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Photo Credit: Jon Endow

Background

Right from the start, we made it a priority to bring an individualized, highly customizable support to the athletes. Why? Because we believe that while workshops and group programs can impact moderate, sometimes temporary change, real transformation happens when people are engaged on a deep, personal level.

The Next Play delivers a truly unique offering to help women athletes create their own personal vision for their life and their success. Our certified, credentialed leadership coaches partner one-on-one with women athletes to offer them something they do not get anywhere else: deep listening, powerful questions, a tailored agenda and outcomes, and most importantly, the spark for lasting transformation.

We've been working with Babson College since 2014, and with the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) since 2015, and the results have been incredible - far beyond what anyone initially expected. We're sharing those results with you here so that you can see what becomes possible when you pair intense, individualized personal and leadership development with the rigor and competition of fierce athletes. Here's a sneak peek: the next generation of confident, bold women leaders.



Measuring Success

From the start, the Next Play was co-founded by big believers in the power of coaching. While Bethany Dufour leads a executive and leadership coaching practice, Sharlene Sones is a veteran sports marketer and coaching client who has also marketed a coaching graduate-degree program for the University of Pennsylvania. Not only did we intuitively understand that coaching *just works*, but our own experience as athletes helped us understand the unique challenges facing women athletes. We also knew, however, that we'd need to supplement this "gut feeling" with quantifiable results that would verify that this unique service was a missing link in the personal development of woman athletes.

To do this, we've issued a baseline survey to all of our athletes before they begin coaching. We ask the athletes to rate (on a scale of 1-5) how strongly they agree with ten statements related to leadership and personal development in these categories: self-esteem, decision-making, self-awareness, visioning/life planning, resourcefulness, time management, self-efficacy, self-compassion (i.e. - resilience), optimism, and confidence. In addition, we also ask athletes to respond to several specific questions about confidence.

At the end of the coaching, the participating athletes complete the same survey, and we compare their responses at the start of the program to those at the end of the program. This allows us to chart overall progress in each category.

From program start to program end, all athletes reported notable advances in all 10 categories related to leadership and personal development.

Professional athletes, across all participants, reported the most significant growth in:



College athletes, across all participants, reported the most significant growth in:





What We've Learned

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Coaching clears the path for academic and sports performance

One of the questions we often face in conversations about The Next Play is, “won’t the coaching distract the player from her sport?” The answer, according to our athletes, is a resounding “No!” In fact, players who participate in The Next Play unanimously report increases in time management, making them *more* effective at using the time, energy, and capacity available to them. Next Play Coaching isn’t just “one more service” added to the list, *it’s the service that makes players better equipped to use those other offerings.*

College athletes have reported that participating in The Next Play has made them more likely to use other on-campus add-ons like Career Services, Academic Support, internships, and even tutoring. They make the most of what’s available to them, because they’re clearer on the direction they want to take, and more intentional as they move down that path.

When it comes to professional athletes, they already have a number of incredible support members on their team - Coaches, Caddies, Physical Therapists, Trainers, and Sports Psychologists to name a few - and have reported that Next Play Coaching has made them approach all of these services differently. One player even commented that she felt more like the CEO of her team - better able to request, direct, and therefore drive results - at the end of her coaching, rather than just bouncing from one to the next lacking purpose or retention.

Skills for athletics, skills for leadership, skills for life.

By the end of their participation in the program, athletes - especially professional athletes - expressed a quantifiable improvement in their overall confidence compared to the start of the program. This was accompanied by an increase in confidence in their sport, and a positive shift in their confidence about their career prospects. In other words, they left the program feeling very hopeful about the future.

We've been clear that this program is not about "retirement," or even "transition," and it's certainly not about us telling you how to become a better golfer, tennis player, or pitcher. This program is about transformation. And the personal growth and change that our athletes experience as a result of taking a deep and clear look at themselves, their personal core values, and the trajectory of their lives, empowers them to look at their whole lives with a fresh perspective and renewed sense of purpose.

Imagine our next generation of women leaders as hopeful and optimistic, able to see the big picture. Sound great? We think so.

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Participants
express an increase
in hope, and
general feeling
of optimism.



“My confidence as an individual has bettered my performance on the field.”

- Next Play Participant

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Coaching catalyzes transformation, not just change.

At Babson, we've had the unique opportunity to work with 14 athletes, 6 of whom have participated for two consecutive years. What we've discovered is that the change students report experiencing through The Next Play is not temporary; it sticks and it lasts. In other words, it transforms.

When it comes to the difference between change and transformation, we see it this way: anyone can make a resolution to change a habit or behavior, only to slip back into old ways of being and doing. But, when you experience true transformation, you can no longer go back.

Here's how we know our students are experiencing true transformation: those who participated in the first year ('14-'15 Academic Year) reported significant progress in 9 of the 10 leadership categories we measured. Then, at the start of the start of the '15-'16 Academic Year, they consistently reported at the same levels they had documented at the end of the prior year (i.e. - the change "stuck" through the summer). What we were most pleased to discover is that when they checked out again at the end of the program in 2016, they reported even more progress year-over-year in 9 of the 10 categories.

What we can learn from that is: 1) they experienced true transformation (they aren't going back!), and 2) they continue to benefit from ongoing coaching as they progress through their academic and athletic careers.

Coaching is a very personal journey. And it's designed that way for a reason. Training and workshops on their own do not create lasting change. It's too easy to hide, to go along with the status quo, and to participate in "group think" when you're in a workshop. Sure, this model can be a fine options for transferring a bit of knowledge or skills, or for creating shared language and experience, but if you want to go deeper than that, if you want to see true transformation, coaching can be the answer.

Even though each athlete works with her coach to chart her own agenda and work toward realizing her own set of goals for the coaching, we were still able to see trends for progress as a group. One trend that stood out to us was that for athletes who participated in consecutive coaching programs, their most significant change started on the inside, and gradually worked its way out into the world.

The way we observed this is through student athletes' most significant progress in Year 1 being on internal consciousness (self-awareness +18% and self-compassion +13%), or how they see themselves in the world. Then, in Year 2, they reported their most significant progress on external behaviors that impact how they show up in the world (life planning/visioning +16%, time management +15%, and confidence +13%).

We believe that this speaks to why coaching works when it comes to unleashing our female athletes' greatest talents into the world: they need to first tap into the ability to see themselves clearly, and only then, can they bring their full power and potential into being.

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Transformation begins with the individual, and it starts on the inside.



“The Next Play taught me more about myself in a few months than I could have learned in a lifetime. I will be forever grateful and hope that many more women have the same opportunity.”

Are you a woman athlete or program administrator? To learn more about how The Next Play can support you, visit thenextplay.org or contact:

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