

A PLAYBOOK FOR CHAMPIONS IN TRAINING







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CONTENTS GOTHAM FC

4 WELCOME!

6 UNSTOPPABLE! The Women of Gotham FC

22 THE POWER OF SPORT

How We're Changing the Game Together

DEAR REBELS

Soccer Superstars in Their Own Words

48 TRAIN LIKE A PRO Skills, Drills, and Activities

50 BODY CONFIDENT YOU!

Embracing Our Bodies On and Off the Pitch

About Gotham FC and Keep Her in the Game

About Body Confident Sport

More Books!

About Rebel Girls







ESTHER GONZÁLEZ

TIERNA DAVIDSO





ESTHER GONZÁLEZ

As the first half of the game came to a close, stoppage time began. With four minutes on the clock, Midge Purce let loose a corner kick. The ball arced toward the box. Esther shot into the air and headed it straight into the back of the net. Esther was fresh from her World Cup win with Spain. And with that header, she scored the game-winning goal for Gotham FC in the 2023 NWSL finals!

Long before Esther was crushing her rivals on the global stage, she had to defeat another opponent: her own shyness. Esther and her sister Nuria spent their days kicking the ball around the *pista verde*, or the "green track." Esther didn't really want to play with anyone else. The other kids spotted her talent, though. They needed a strong forward and invited her to join their team. *No way!*

she thought. She'd rather stick with her siblings. But one day, after a heart-to-heart with her mother, Esther decided to step out of her comfort zone and give it a shot.

Soccer fans worldwide are glad she did! At Real Madrid, she scored 39 goals in 77 matches. She joined Gotham FC in 2023 and continues to dazzle crowds with her fearless attacks and breathtaking goals.

FIERCE FACT

In the 82nd minute of the CONCACAF W
Champions Cup final, Esther took a penalty
kick. The keeper knocked the ball away, and
Esther slammed it back into the net to nail
the game-winning goal!

TRAINING TIP

For the week before a game, Esther learns about the team she is about to face. She visualizes the moves that will be the most dangerous for their defense. And then, before kickoff, she turns on music to get herself pumped up!



DEFENDER JESS CARTER

In a bustling family with lots of siblings, Jess was the secondyoungest. She always wanted to keep up with her brothers. So sometimes when they played soccer, she'd offer to be the goalie. There she would stand, while they launched shot after shot her way. She might've been younger and smaller, but she definitely held her own.

At 16, Jess was called up to play her first match for Birmingham City. But it wasn't just any game. It was the 2014 Champions League quarterfinal! The stands were packed, the pressure was on, but nothing could dampen her fire. Jess jogged onto the field and did what she did best: played soccer with power and confidence.

She was even named the player of the match!

Her star continued to rise. Four years later, she joined Chelsea FC, one of the proudest moments of her life. And she's got a lot to be proud of! In more than 150 appearances, Jess left her mark: well-timed tackles, game-changing interceptions, and a late-in-the-game free kick that set up a crucial goal in a semifinal. She helped Chelsea win five Women's Super League titles.

In 2024, Jess packed up her cleats and brought her talents to the US. To all young athletes, she says,

"Be honest about what makes you happy.

If you're not happy, you can't perform

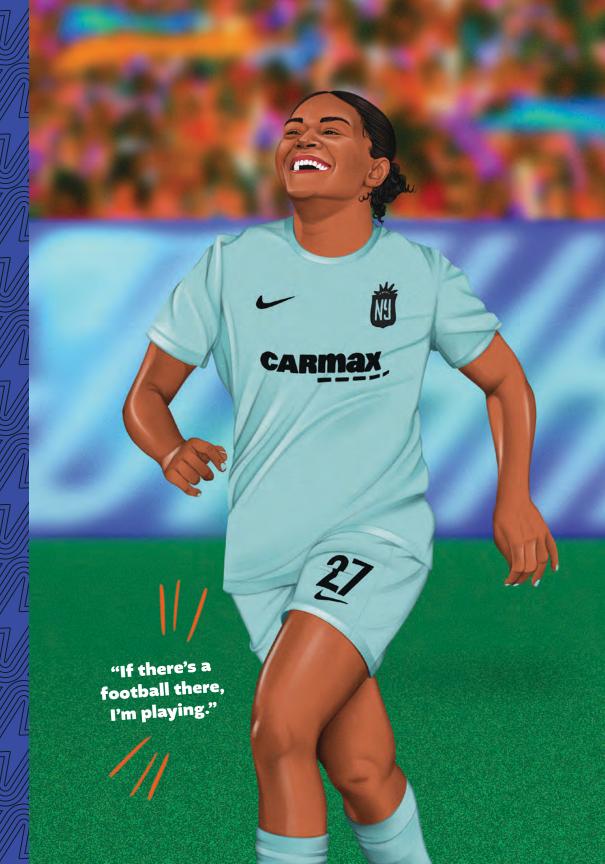
to the best of your ability."

FIERCE FACT

With the English national team, Jess won the Euro 2022 and reached the 2023 World Cup finals.

TRAINING TIP

Jess says she learned the hard way that her time off the pitch has a huge impact on her game. Things like eating the foods that give your body energy and allowing time for your body to recover are really important!



DEFENDER

EMILY SONNETT

Emily and her twin sister were a rambunctious pair. To channel all that energy, their parents signed them up for soccer. Little did they know that they'd just unlocked the key to Emily's future.

Dedicated to her training and beloved by her teammates, Emily was elected team captain in high school and again in college at the University of Virginia. Scooped up by the Portland Thorns, she assisted in the team's championship-winning goal in her first pro season. Later, she brought her top-notch passing accuracy to the Washington Spirit and helped lead them to an NWSL Championship too.

For Emily, the name of the game is versatility. She uses her deep knowledge of the game to adapt to different roles and positions. Whatever her coach and her team need her to do, she's there. And they know they can depend on her. "I have never been a starter for the national team," she says, "so I feel like I have had to sharpen my mental part of the game and be able to stay ready at all times for 'my chance.'"

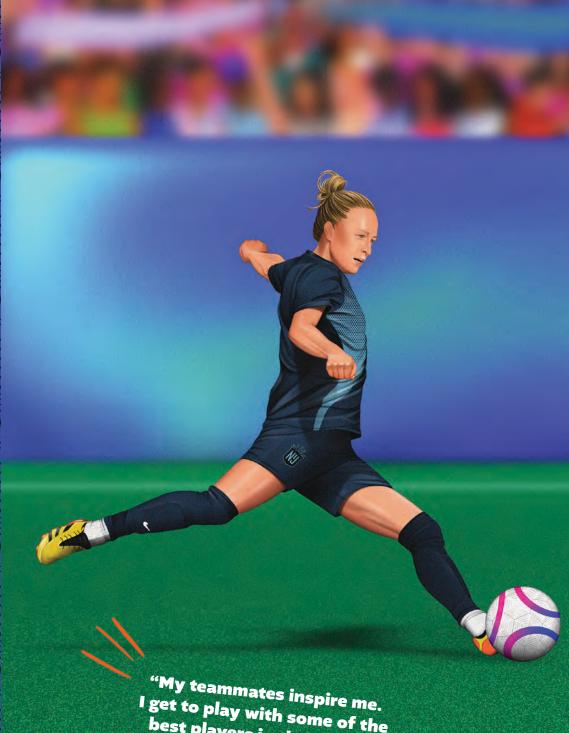
Her adaptability has paid off. In addition to her two NWSL victories, she's a World Cup winner, an Olympic gold medalist, and a seven-time SheBelieves Cup champ.

FIERCE FACT

Emily often meditates before a game so she can slow down and really think about what her objectives are for each outing.

TRAINING TIP

"Working with a sport psychologist,' says Emily, "has really elevated my mental game."



I get to play with some of the best players in the world!"

ANN-KATRIN BERGER

GOALKEEPER

At four years old, Ann joined her father's football club. She and a group of other unstoppable tykes tore across the field and did their best to dribble balls half their size. She was often the youngest of the bunch, but that didn't dissuade her from playing any open position. It wasn't until she was 16 that she found the role she'd be famous for: goalie.

Watching the German women's national team as a young person, Ann knew she could make it as a professional athlete. But her teachers, and even her own grandmother, dismissed the idea. *There is no way to earn a living in women's soccer*, they said. But Ann was certain. And she doesn't like being told what she can't do.

So she rose to the challenge. Before joining Gotham FC, she played professionally in Germany and France, then made the move to Birmingham City. She triumphed in six seasons at Chelsea, snagged a Golden Glove, and won bronze at the Paris Olympics.

"I made it," she said. "And I showed everyone you can do it."

No matter how high the stakes, Ann exudes calm, guarding the goal and deflecting penalties with precision. She wants her teammates to have complete confidence that she's got their backs.

mates to

FIERCE FACT

's got

Ann has been treated for thyroid cancer twice, in 2017 and 2022.

TRAINING TIP

According to Ann, to make it as a professional athlete, you need to be competitive and disciplined.

And you need to have fun!

"I try to live, react, and act in the moment.

If I think too much, it will ruin my style of play."

DEFENDER LILLY REALE

Lilly grew up in a big, boisterous, tight-knit family who encouraged her to be herself and live life to the fullest. And in soccer, she found another big, boisterous family who pushed her to be her best.

When her mom first signed Lilly and her sister up for soccer, Lilly was more interested in picking flowers and doing cartwheels than tracking the ball. But soon she made friends and started to find her groove.

In eighth grade, when she left basketball behind to focus on soccer, she wasn't totally sure if it was soccer she liked best or the amazing friendships she'd built. But as she tore down the field thwarting attackers at her first US youth national team camp, it became clear. Worries couldn't reach her when there was a ball at her feet. Soccer made her feel strong and free.

At UCLA, Lilly earned three Defensive Player of the Year awards and helped her team win the 2022 national championship.

And now there's definitely no time for Lilly to pick flowers on the field! She made her NWSL debut in March

2025 and played her first game as part of the US Women's National Team four months later.

FIERCE FACT

Lilly is a music lover!
Listening to slower R&B
songs can help her get into
the right mindset before a
game. She also loves yoga.

TRAINING TIP

Long runs aren't Lilly's favorite, though she knows they are good for maintaining fitness. She says, "Running with a friend can make it better!"



MIDIFIELDER ROSE LAVELLE

In 2004, soccer legends Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, and Cindy Parlow arrived in Cincinnati to play a match. Still flying high from their 1999 World Cup win, they trounced New Zealand 6–0... and changed Rose Lavelle's life.

Nine-year-old Rose had been playing soccer for four years (and she'd already done a few school projects on Mia Hamm!). Seeing her idols in person unlocked something inside her. That's what I want to do, she thought. And she got to work. Small, quick, and nimble, Rose perfected the art of switching direction without warning and leaving her defenders in the dust. At the University of Wisconsin, she amassed so many goals and awards that she was the number one draft pick during the 2017 NWSL college draft.

Later, during the final match of the 2019 World Cup, Rose tore down the center of the field, outmaneuvered the Netherlands' defense, and slammed the ball into the goal. At 24, she cemented the US team's victory and catapulted her name into the history books.

Rose may make it look easy, but she has struggled with a hamstring injury for years. Even when she needs to take time off to recover, she looks for the silver lining.

"You learn the most about yourself," she says, "during the hardest times."

TRAINING TIP

"My favorite thing to do"
says Rose, "is to go outside
with a ball and have no plan."
She plays around with the
ball, tries new moves, and
envisions game scenarios as
she practices her footwork.

FIERCE FACT

Rose credits her grandmother with being her biggest inspiration.



GENERAL MANAGER

HAEL AVERBUCH WEST

The other kids got bored quickly. But not Yael. Give her a coloring book, and she could focus for hours. When she was seven, she turned that laser-like focus to soccer. The more she played and watched matches, the more she raised her game.

As the only girl on a boys' team, she hustled extra hard to fit in. When she got to the University of North Carolina, her new teammates were intense. So she raised her game again—and became a two-time national champion. After college, she signed up with Sky Blue FC (which would later become Gotham FC). She leveled up and, a year later, scored a goal playing for the US national team.

With every milestone she reached, she raised her game.

But soccer was taking a toll on her body. Yael has ulcerative colitis, a disease that affects the digestive tract. Stress causes flare-ups, and competing at her level was *stressful*. In 2018, she made the tough decision to step away from the game and look after her health.

Her time as a professional soccer player had come to an end. But her time supporting, motivating, and strategizing with other world-class athletes had not. As the general manager of Gotham FC, she gets to help raise everyone's game.

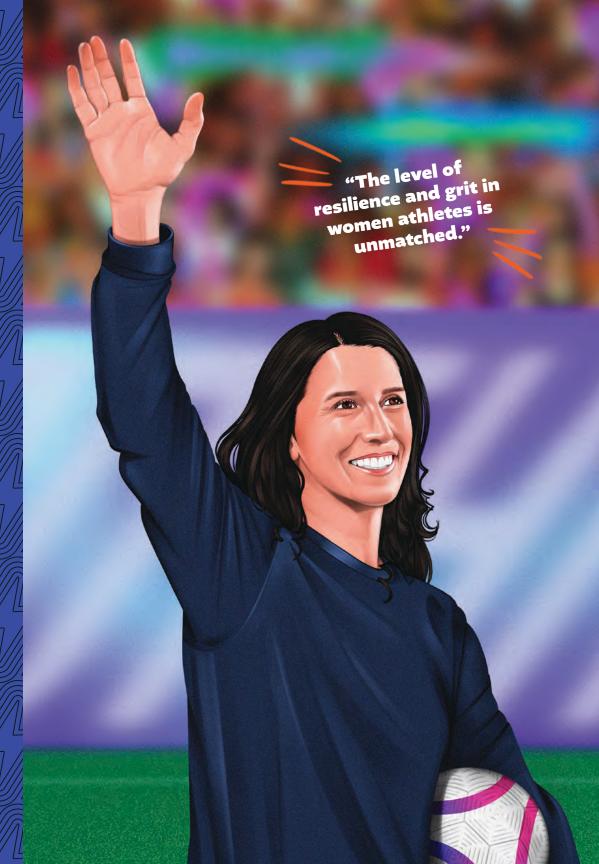
FIERCE FACT

Yael helped start the NWSL Players

Association, to be a voice for the players and advocate for better pay, better facilities, and more opportunities for women athletes.

TRAINING TIP

Yael believes in the power of setting clear goals. Her idols, Mia Hamm and Kristine Lilly, went to UNC and played for the US Women's National Team. As a kid, Yael vowed to do the same.





THE POWER OF SPORT!

HOW WE'RE CHANGING THE GAME TOGETHER!

Each new generation of girls in soccer has more opportunities than the one before. And Gotham FC is part of that growth. Through their Keep Her in the Game program, presented by Dove, Gotham FC is supporting young athletes in their community. In this chapter, you'll meet a coach and some young athletes from Keep Her in the Game who are thriving on and off the field. Kicking, passing, shooting, scoring, and laughing and connecting with

their teammates—they love what playing sports brings to their lives. Maybe they are a lot like you?



Women's sports are on the rise, but teen girls are dropping out of sports at a higher rate than the boys their age. Experts point to a bunch of reasons for this: Some schools don't offer as many sports for girls, and when they do, the girls' teams aren't always funded as well as the boys' teams. Some girls feel uncomfortable with their bodies or how their clothing fits as their bodies are growing and changing. Other girls feel pressured by their classmates to act or look a certain way. They may hear outdated stereotypes about what an athlete should look like or even that girls shouldn't play sports at all.

And that stinks!

Everyone is welcome in sports. And there are tons of

benefits to playing sports. Girls who play sports are more likely to feel confident, earn better grades, graduate from high school, and be hired for leadership roles in top companies later in life. And that doesn't even touch on the lifelong friendships girls can develop with their teammates.

FIERCE FACT

70%

of girls involved in sports say they have high self-esteem. Gotham FC is made up of folks who know the power of playing sports and want as many young people as possible to get in on the fun. So they launched a program, Keep Her in the Game, to help keep girls energized and excited about playing the sport they love. In its first year, Gotham FC partnered with Girls Leadership to deliver training to 97 youth soccer coaches, reaching more than 1,780 girls and gender-expansive youth—mostly 11- to 13-year-olds—in the New Jersey/New York area.

With Keep Her in the Game, soccer practice isn't just about soccer drills. Girls work on developing their confidence, resilience, teamwork, and leadership skills. Plus they explore their feelings and dreams, do team-building exercises, and work on developing healthy habits. And it doesn't matter whether they've ever played a sport before. People can always try out new ways to move their bodies—no matter their age or experience.

FIERCE FACT

61%

of girls who play sports say they've learned lifechanging communication skills through sports. These skills help them become leaders.

MEET MORGAN

Bouncing from foot to foot,
Morgan stands with bent
knees and hands spread wide,
ready to pounce when the
ball flies her way. She's in the
goal, doing catching drills.
Keeping her eyes locked on
the ball, she feels focused
and totally alive. "I'm at my
happiest when I'm playing
sports," says Morgan. Soccer
and lacrosse are her top picks, but she likes

basketball and football too.

One of the best things about playing soccer is that it can uplift her mood. If she's ever feeling down, Morgan knows playing soccer or watching a match will make her feel better. Sure, sometimes she can get a little nervous before she plays. What if I mess up really badly? she might worry. But when that happens, she turns on some music and remembers her mom's solid advice: "Trust your training."

While participating in Keep Her in the Game, Morgan has met other girls her age, and it's been exciting for her to see how different people handle different situations. With her new teammates, she's learned that communication is key to solving problems on the field—and in life.

FIERCE FACT

Morgan admires Gotham
FC forward Midge Purce
for her grit, her work ethic,
her personality, and her
style. She also looks up to
basketball players Paige
Bueckers and Kobe Bryant.



For Isabel, sports are a family affair. Her mom and grandma are runners. Her uncle and cousins play soccer, and her stepdad is a boxer. For as long as she can remember, there have been soccer matches playing on the TV in the living room or the kitchen. So it was no surprise when she started dribbling and juggling a soccer ball. And soon she was soaring, feeling light, free, and powerful as she raced up and down the pitch.

As a young athlete, Isabel enjoys the sense of community fostered by Keep Her in the Game. She is an only child and finds being part of the group heartwarming and inspiring. Everyone feels safe and supported, so they can share their thoughts and opinions in a judgment-free environment. When challenges arise, she's confident that she and her teammates can handle them together.

"Soccer means
everything because
it allows me to
meet new people.
It allows me to
represent and show
who I am and where
I come from and
learn from other
cultures."

Isabel has a message for other soccer-loving girls like her: "Have fun in what you do. Leave all the negativity on the field, and transform it into something beautiful that can help you be happy and grow."

FIERCE FACT

What does Isabel want to be when she grows up? The best soccer player alive, of course!



MEET CHLOE

Picture this: The game is about to begin. The players are stretching and jumping in place. The sidelines are full of parents and friends. Chloe's nerves start to creep in. But she pauses. She takes a few deep breaths, clears her mind, and focuses on what she's learned in practice. She's trained hard for this, and she knows she's ready.

Chloe's been playing soccer since she was six years old, and she's spent the last six years guarding the goal. To prep for practice, she likes doing band warm-ups. Diving drills, cone shuffles, and catch-and-release drills help her tighten up her reaction time. "Being a goalkeeper," she says, "has taught me how to be strong under pressure and how to lead from the back."

Spending time with the other girls in Keep Her in the Game inspires Chloe. Hearing their stories reminds her that everyone goes through ups and downs, and that she's not the only one hustling for the sport she loves.

And it shows how strong girls are!

FIERCE FACT

Chloe looks up to Ann-Katrin Berger. She admires that Ann is "focused, quick, and fearless"—just like she is!



Yanique was three years old when she began playing sports. She'd run as fast as her little legs would take her. As she grew up, the soccer field became her safe space. It was a place of joy and comfort when life got tough.

When Yanique's family
relocated to the United States
from Jamaica, money was tight.
They couldn't afford fees for soccer
clubs or camps. Even when scholarships
were available, finding transportation to and from practices
and games could be a stumbling block. That's why she founded
Unique Ballers FC when she grew up. She wanted to make sure
other girls could follow their soccer dreams, regardless of how
much money they had.

For Yanique, the name of the game is empowerment.

She and the other coaches at Keep Her in the Game are empowering girls to play their best and chase their dreams.

Her advice for young athletes? "Be courageous. It might feel scary at first, but remember: you belong here. And hard work does pay off."

"Sports have also shown me how to show up for my community—through both the highs and the lows."

FIERCE FACT

As a kid, Yanique looked up to Didier Drogba, a powerful striker from Ivory Coast. She was also inspired by Sydney Leroux and Crystal Dunn. Seeing athletes who looked like her gave her a special sense of belonging in the sport.



DEAR REBELS

SOCCER SUPERSTARS in their own words

Midge Purce

MANDU FREEMAN

The powerhouse players of Gotham FC have spent countless hours training,

competing, and bonding with their teammates.

with their teammates.
And they've amassed
an incomparable treasure
trove of stories and
guidance. Read on to get
the inside scoop on handling
the challenges of being a
professional athlete, and
get advice for bringing your
A game to the field.



FORWARD ## 1 1

Midge helped lead Gotham to its first NWSL Championship in 2023. She was named tournament MVP.

What has been a highlight of your career so far?

Winning the 2023 NWSL Championship with Gotham FC after being in last place the year before. I'm so proud of that team and what we were able to accomplish because every single player worked as hard as they could that year to do something no one thought we could accomplish. We were



What challenges have you had to overcome in order to play soccer? How did you get past them?

I tore my ACL [the ligament in the knee that connects the thigh bone to the shin bone] in 2024 right before the Olympics. It was really difficult for me because I trained for a very long time to make the Olympic roster, and it felt like all the work I did was for nothing. I got past it by learning to accept that it's okay that I didn't get what I wanted or achieve my goal. There's always a new goal to achieve, so I set a new one and put energy into chasing that one. My new goal was to come back a better player than I was. I'm still working on it!

Do you have any habits or rituals for before games?

I like to picture what I want to do on the field before I do it. I imagine what moves I want to do in the corner to get by defenders and how I want to beat them. I like to play with flair, and sometimes that takes some brainstorming!





DEFENDER |

Two Olympic medals, one World Cup gold, and a CONCACAF triumph—Tierna's got them all!

You were the youngest player on the World Cup roster. How did that feel?

Obviously, there were nerves about being the youngest and not knowing if I belonged or how I was going to perform on a big stage. But there was also a feeling of invincibility. I knew if I screwed up, I had the best players in the world around me.

How do you calm your nerves before a match?

When I'm anxious before a game, I remind myself that it's the game I've always played. The circumstances or the opponent might be different, but I'm still playing a 90-minute game. There are still 22 players on the field. The rules are still the same. I remind myself that it doesn't matter if I'm 14 again and playing at a high school field or I'm 25 and playing in a sold-out stadium in Paris. I'm still trying to do the same thing.

What traits does a person need to succeed in soccer?

Definitely perseverance. Everybody at this level has stories of when they've been knocked down or turned away, whether it's getting cut from a team or having an injury or uncertainty or not starting. You need the strength of mind to continue to push forward—and honestly, sometimes a little bit of insanity to continue to push forward and continue to love the game even when it's beating you down. Also the ability to adapt and change based on your environment.

What challenges have you had to overcome in order to continue playing?

The main one would be injury. I tore my ACL in 2022, and that was difficult to come back from—and not so much because it's a long rehab and it feels uncomfortable. The most difficult part of it was not feeling 100% myself when I stepped back out onto the field, and having to have grace and patience while I worked through those kinks.

What advice do you have for young athletes who are dealing with injuries?

First, take time for yourself if you feel like you need it. An injury can bring up complex emotions, and it's okay to feel angry and sad or upset, and it can feel hard to watch your team play when you're not able to. It's important to take time to process that and to be able to talk to trusted people, whether it's your parents, coach, therapist, other teammates, or whoever you want to talk to. It is also about being present. Your teammates love you as a person, not just as a player. So while they miss you on the field, they would still love to have you around.

FIERCE FACT

When it comes to drills, Tierna loves a good passing pattern!

"I hope we can continue to have more opportunities for any and everybody from all different types of backgrounds to be able to enjoy soccer and to be able to learn and make new friends through the sport."



SARAH SCHUPANSKY

MIDFIELDER

#

In 2024, Sarah led the NCAA in assists.
In 2025, she was named player of the match in her first professional game.

What has been a highlight of your career so far?

I've experienced some incredible moments on the field, including scoring my first NWSL goal and winning an international championship, and those moments certainly do not go unappreciated. What I will remember the most, however, is the impact I've been able to have on

the young athletes out there who dream of reaching this level one day. To be able to show them that it's possible means more to me than any trophy or medal.

What challenges have you had to overcome in order to play soccer?

How did you get past them?

I would say one of the biggest challenges any

athlete has to overcome is the self-doubt that may creep in from time to time. When I was younger, I remember playing in an environment that was not the most positive or encouraging. Thankfully, my love for the game and my strong support system helped me persevere and overcome all the feelings of self-doubt that crept in during this time. Still, no matter how many people believed in me, I've learned that none of it would have been possible without consistently believing in myself.

How do you mentally prepare for training and competition?

The thing that has always helped me feel mentally ready for competition is knowing I did everything I could to prepare for that moment. Whether it's making sure I fully understand what's expected of me in the next training session or game, reviewing film of the opposition or myself, or taking care of my recovery and physical prep-these are all things within my control. When I prepare properly and intentionally, I feel confident. And preparation

confident. And prepara builds confidence, which fuels performance and ultimately leads to success.

What advice do you have for young athletes today?

If you ever feel like your love for the game is fading, pause and remind yourself why you started. Remember the kid you once were-the one who was ecstatic just to run around the field, chasing a ball under the sun. Even at the highest levels, with all the tactics, skill, speed, and pressure, at its core, it's still the same simple game you fell in love with. Hold on to that. Because that love is what makes every tough day, every long practice, and every hardearned victory worth it.

FIERCE FACT

Before games, Sarah always gets good luck texts from her grandma and her aunt.

"I wouldn't be me without soccer."



FORMER PLAYER,
GOTHAM FC AMBASSADOR,
AND ESPN ANALYST

Two-time World Cup winner, NWSL champion, and social justice advocate, Ali Krieger has fought for big wins on and off the field.

What is it like to win a World Cup?

Standing on that podium, hearing the national anthem, hoisting the trophy and knowing everything we'd been through to get there—it's a moment that lives in my heart forever. It was emotional, powerful, and absolutely worth every bit of work.

How do you deal with setbacks and losing matches?

Setbacks are a natural part of sports and life, and how you respond to them matters more than the setback itself. Losing is part of the game, and making mistakes is not only allowed—it's necessary. That's when you grow the most. Some of my biggest breakthroughs came after the hardest moments, because I stayed

committed to learning and showing up better the next time.

What has it been like to transition from playing soccer to covering it for ESPN?

It's been empowering.

If I can't play the game
anymore, why not talk
about it? I get to stay close
to the sport I love and now
impact it from a different
perspective. I see it as
an opportunity to help
grow the game, highlight
important stories, and
advocate for players (especially
women) in a new way.



MICHELLE BETOS

FORMER PLAYER,
ASSISTANT GOALKEEPER
COACH

The 2015 goalkeeper of the year, Michelle won two NWSL championships before she retired as a player in 2024.

Was there a moment when you knew you would play soccer as a career?

I'm not sure I ever *knew* soccer was going to be a career for me until it happened. The reality is when you're chasing a big dream, it's often about going out on a limb and investing incredible amounts of time and effort and sacrifice without ever knowing for sure it will pay off. The life of a professional athlete is amazing and fulfilling, but it is also full of uncertainty. It is human nature to seek comfort, but I believe any truly great endeavor requires being completely out of your comfort

You've been a player and a team captain. What does it mean to you to be a good teammate?

Being a good teammate is about caring for others as you do for yourself, and sometimes even more. It is about investing in the lives and journeys of others, celebrating their successes like they are your own, and making sure they never feel alone in their failures. Being a good teammate is having someone's back no matter what. and knowing that you're going after something bigger than yourselves

together.

What qualities make for a good team captain?

I think the most important thing is being authentic and leading from your innate strengths. It is also vital that you own the platform you have. You cannot ask others to do anything, or be anything, that you yourself are not willing to. Some lead with words, but actions are always the most important.

How can young athletes mentally prepare themselves?

When I work with athletes on the mental side, I always encourage them to start small. What are tiny habits you can commit to every day? Often these approaches end up having the most impact. Breathwork [controlled breathing exercises] is a big one for me. There are different styles of breathwork to ramp up energy and focus, or to bring calm. Breathwork can also be used in meditation and mindfulness practices that translate to greater presence in training and games. These things don't have to be timeconsuming or overwhelmingthey can be done in five minutes or less, or even in just one or two rounds of breath right before you take the field. I also really value the practice of visualization [picturing in your mind things that you want to happen].

What does soccer mean to you?

It is hard to put into words what soccer means to me.
Probably the only one that does it justice is "everything."





In these pages, you'll find some ways to hone your skills in your house, at the park, or wherever you can find some space to move your body.

If you're exercising at home, make sure to move any breakables out of the way and get permission from your grown-ups to use balls inside.

START WITH A STRETCH

One of the best ways to warm up your body, increase your flexibility, and boost your performance in any sport is to stretch. Stretching before working out or playing matches also helps you avoid injury.

QUAD STRETCH

Stand up tall. Raise your right foot behind you. Use your right hand to hold your foot near your backside. Keeping your knees close together, hold for 30 seconds. Switch legs and repeat. Do the stretch three times on each leg.

CALF STRETCH

Stand about two feet away from a wall. Extend your right foot in front of you, placing the ball of your foot against the wall and keeping your heel on the ground. Slowly lean into the wall. Keep your right knee straight. Hold for 30 seconds. Switch legs and repeat. Do the stretch three times on each leg.

HAMSTRING STRETCH

BRUNINHA

Sit on the ground with your legs in front of you and your knees facing up. Bend your left leg slightly, and keep your right leg straight. Lean forward and try to touch your right toes. Hold for 30 seconds. Switch legs and repeat. Do the stretch three times on each leg.

HIP FLEXOR STRETCH

Kneel on your right knee with your left foot in front of you. Place your hands on your hips. Lean forward and hold for 30 seconds. Switch legs and repeat. Do the stretch three times on each leg.

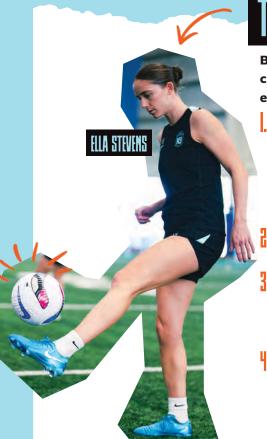
TRAINING TIP

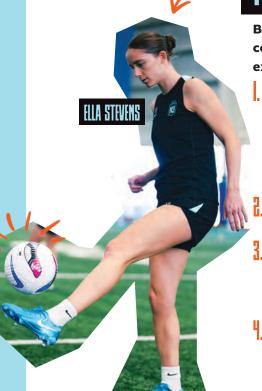
VISUALIZATION is a powerful tool for athletes. Picture yourself on the field and imagine yourself playing your best—making strong passes, outmaneuvering your opponents, and burying balls in the goal.



Boost your balance and ball coordination with a simple exercise: juggling!

- Using your right foot, kick the ball to keep it in the air. See how many times you can kick it to keep it off the ground using your right foot. When you are playing inside, try to keep the ball at or below knee level.
- After two minutes, switch feet and repeat with your left foot.
- 1. Now alternate as you juggle. First kick the ball with your right foot, then your left. See how long you can keep the ball in the air.
- After you master your footwork, practice using the top of your legs to juggle.





GET YOUR HEART PUMPING

Before beginning your soccer drills, mix and match a few cardio exercises to get warmed up. Here are a few fun options:

- Jogging in place for 20 seconds
- · 20 jumping jacks
- 20 squats
- 20 high knees
- 20 forward and backward arm circles
- 20 leg swings on each leg (bend your leg behind you and swing it forward like you are kicking a ball)





Toe taps are a fun and effective way to work on your fitness and coordination.

SIMPLE TOE TAPS

Here is the simplest version of a toe tap.

- . Tap the bottom of your right foot on the top of the ball.
- 2. Switch feet to tap the bottom of your left foot on the top of the ball.
- Repeat. Keep the ball as still as possible as you continue switching feet and tapping the ball.

TOE TAPS AROUND THE WORLD

In this version of the toe tap exercise, keep the ball in place, but move your body around the ball as you switch from foot to foot.

TOE TAPS ON THE MOVE

When you tap the ball with the bottom of your feet, roll it forward. Keep it controlled and push the ball forward. Once you've mastered pushing the ball forward, try going backward! This time, pull the ball toward you with each toe tap.

BRAZILIAN TOE TAPS

This version of the workout adds a new rhythm:

Tap the bottom of your right foot on the top of the ball.



L. Switch feet to tap the bottom of your left foot on the top of the ball.

right-left-right left-right-left

I. Move your right foot behind your left foot and tap the ball again.



Repeat the sequence starting with your left foot: left foot tap in front, right foot tap in front, left foot tap behind.



KEEP IT IN THE BOX!

You can practice your ball control and agility even in small spaces.

- items that won't break if hit by a ball: stuffed animals, dolls, pillows, shoes. Use them to make a square about 6 feet wide.
- throughout the box. Keep it moving, but make sure the ball doesn't go out of bounds.
 Touch the ball with every part of your feet: your toes, your heels, the soles of your feet, and the inside and outside of each foot.

STELLA NYAMEKYE



Make up your own patterns or rules. For example, set a timer and touch the ball only with the insides of your feet for one minute. Then restart the time and touch the ball with only the outsides of your feet. Or move the ball from corner to corner using only the soles of your feet.

TRAINING TIP

Esther González loves to train in small spaces where there is pressure from other players and she needs to hold on to the ball. She says, "It requires concentration, anticipation, visualization."



Practice your aim with both feet.

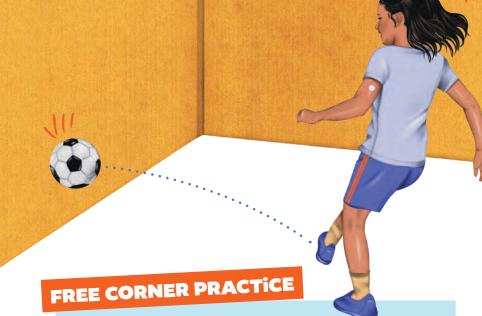
CONTROLLED CORNER PRACTICE

- Stand 6-8 feet from the corner of a room or anywhere where two walls meet.
- Use your right foot to kick the ball to the wall on the left.
- When it comes back to you, stop it. Then use your left foot to kick the ball to the wall on your right.
- When the ball comes back to you, stop it.
 Then use your right foot to kick the ball to the wall on the left.
- . Keep alternating feet and walls for five minutes.

TRAINING TIP

"Simple setups like
just a ball and two
cones are great for
me. I like for the drills
to be simple so I can
bring creativity."

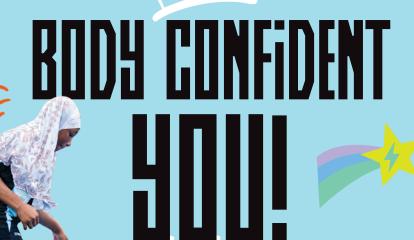
-MIDGE PURCE



Repeat the exercise above, but this time, do not stop the ball each time it comes back to you. Use whichever foot you want to keep kicking the ball from one wall to the other. Practice your aim and ball control—and have fun!







EMBRACING OUR BODIES ON AND OFF THE PITCH

Many girls stop playing sports during their preteen or teenage years because they are uncomfortable with their changing bodies, how their uniforms fit, how they look, or how they think other people think they look. This chapter includes some tried-and-true techniques for helping girls grow and maintain their body confidence through movement and sports.











WHAT IS BODY CONFIDENCE?

Body image is how we think, feel, and behave toward our bodies, including the way they look and what they can do. It can be positive or negative—or anything in between. Many people have body image concerns. These concerns can lead to unhealthy worries about body weight and eating, which can affect your self-esteem and your mental and physical health. Body image concerns can also make sports less fun or even prompt some girls to stop playing. That's why it's so important to develop some strategies to help you recognize all the amazing things your body can do.

Body confidence means respecting your body, listening to what it needs (like rest when it's tired or movement when it's stiff) and learning ways to resist outside pressures to look a certain way. It's about accepting your body, even the parts you might struggle with sometimes, and appreciating what your body allows you to do in life.

Sadly, having low body confidence is one of the main reasons why girls drop out of sports. When you are body confident, you are more likely to have better mood and self-esteem, continue exercising and playing sports, and do better at school and in your relationships with friends and family.

Body image concerns are common among people of all ages. You may hear people repeat outdated stereotypes about how a girl is supposed to look or act or be. And you may feel pressure, even from people you care about, to look or act a certain way. You are not alone. It can be tough at times, but you can practice and learn new ways to accept and respect your body, just like you practice and learn new moves and mindsets when you're playing sports.



Athletes come

in all shapes

and sizes.

WHO IS AN ATHLETE?

An **athlete** is anyone who moves their body in a way that makes them feel good.

Do you love soccer or enjoy kicking balls into a goal? Do you like to play badminton? Shoot hoops? Go for walks with your friends? Do you ever dance around when you

> hear your favorite song? Good. Then you are an athlete.

Sport refers to all sorts of movement—not just competitive team activities. Walking, playing catch, playing volleyball, surfing, rock climbing, taking a tap dance class, competing in the Olympics, and doing yoga—these are all ways to participate in sport.



THE POWER OF WORDS

Take a moment to think about how often you make comments about your body or hear others comment about their own bodies or other people's.

> "Ugh. my thighs are too big."



This is **body talk**. Even when it is meant as a compliment to a friend, it can be harmful because it's all about looks. These comments put the importance on someone's physical appearance rather than on all their other interests and qualities. Body Talk sends a message that there is an ideal way to look, and it can keep you and your friends from feeling good about your bodies.

Unfortunately body talk is sometimes common in sport spaces, and it can make girls feel uncomfortable when they're playing. One way to avoid focusing on this is to create a **Body Talk Free Zone**. Chat with your friends or teammates about body talk and when it comes up the most. Maybe it is in the locker room, in a group chat, or when you first see one another in the morning at school. Make a pact to change it up and talk about things other than looks.

Here are some other things you can talk about:

INTERESTS

"I love to cook. I tried a new recipe this weekend."

ACTIONS

"Katy always cheers for her friends at soccer matches."

PERSONALITY TRAITS

"Did you read the poem Jordan wrote in English class? They're so creative."

CHALLENGE BODY TALK

When you hear body talk, you have some options. You can ignore it. You can walk away or change the subject. You can also speak up to help change the vibe. Here are some examples of things you might hear someone say and how you might respond.

BODY TALK STATEMENT:

"I look so fat today."

COMERACK COMMENT:

"Bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. It would be so boring if we all looked the same. Tell me what's really going on for you today. It sounds like you're struggling, and I want you to know I'm here for you."

BODY TALK STATEMENT

"I hate my arms.
They're covered in stretch marks."

COMEBACK COMMENT:

"Stretch marks are totally normal!
Plus, think of how strong
your arms are and all the things
your arms allow you to do."

BODY TALK STATEMENT

"She's too big to be wearing those shorts."

COMEBACK COMMENT:

"I don't like judging people based on how they look. She should wear whatever feels good to her. Let's focus on how we play, not how we look."

It takes practice to stop yourself from engaging in body talk and to be able to respond to body talk in the moment. And that's okay! As you respond to more body talk, you'll get better at it, and you and your friends will feel more body confident.

Together, we can change the vibe so everyone feels at home in their body.



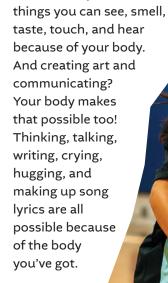
WHAT CAN YOUR BODY DO?

Have you ever taken the time to consider all the things your body can do?

Think of all the physical activities you can do—from swimming and stretching to playing tag and playing soccer to doing jumping jacks and recording TikTok dances. Think about all the body functions that relate to your health and growth, like breathing, growing hair and nails, healing from cuts and scrapes, and getting better after you've been sick.

Your body is also what makes your senses work. Think of all the

CARMAX



CELEBRATE HOUR POWER

Focusing on what your body does, instead of how it looks, will help you appreciate it and give you more body confidence.
Give it a try! Write a list of things your body does that are important to you. Here are some examples.

"I am grateful for my leg muscles.

They help me outrun my opponents

in races and score goals when I

play soccer. And my lungs help me

breathe deeply when I go fast."

"My brain lets me be creative. I can write poems and make up funny jokes that make my family laugh. Also, because of my body, I can talk, yell, smile, and laugh."

"Whenever I hear music, I start to move. I turn up the volume and dance around. I can dance alone or with my friends. And when I am dancing, all my worries go away." "I love that my body was able to heal after I had a bad cold. That meant I could get back to school and doing the things
I love."



TIME TO CHECK IN!



Here's a simple thing you can do to feel calmer and more confident: Take a moment to connect with your body and listen to its needs. You can perform a Three-Step Sense Check-In anywhere, anytime. It only takes a few minutes. Here's how to do it.

Three-Step Sense Check-In

STEP 1

SLOW DOWN

- Pause and take three deep breaths—in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- If you feel comfortable, close your eyes.

STEP 2:

CHECK IN

- Use your mind to scan your body, slowly moving from your head down to your toes.
- Pay attention to what your body is feeling. What sensations are you noticing? (For example, are your feet cold? Are your shoulders tense?) Take notice of your feelings, but don't judge them.
- Ask yourself: Does your body need something? (For example, do you need some water, a snack, a quick muscle warm-up?)

STEP 3:

MOVE FORWARD

Now that you've checked in with your body, do something to meet your body's needs. Grab something to eat if you're feeling hungry. Put on fuzzy socks if your feet are cold. Roll your shoulders forward and backward and gently tilt your head from side to side to work out tension in your shoulders.



When you check in with your body, you may find you don't need anything at all. Or you may discover that a quick act of self-care might dramatically improve how you're feeling. Sometimes a few minutes of stretching or deep breathing or a hydrating glass of water can really improve your mood or your performance in your sport—and in life!

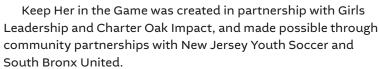
The information in this chapter was adapted from Body Confident Sport, a set of tools developed by Nike and Dove, in partnership with experts from the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West of England, and the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota.

ABOUT GOTHAM FC

Gotham FC is a professional women's soccer team representing New Jersey and New York with top players. The club has been part of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) since the league launched in 2013. The team won the inaugural Women's Professional Soccer Championship in 2009, the NWSL Championship in 2023, and the CONCACAF W Champions Cup in 2025. Gotham FC plays its home matches at Sports Illustrated Stadium in Harrison, NJ. On and off the pitch, Gotham FC is committed to increasing youth access to soccer, LGBTQIA+ rights and advocacy, women's advancement, and sustainability. gothamfc.com



Keep Her in the Game, presented by Dove, is Gotham FC's flagship social impact program designed to empower the trusted adults in girls' lives-their coaches and parents-with research-backed training to help girls and gender-expansive youth develop leadership skills, find their voices, and stay committed to soccer. By creating empowering experiences with club players and facilities, Keep Her in the Game delivers moments of joy and connection for the girls themselves.



The initiative's continued success is thanks to its founding philanthropic partner, the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, whose mission is to improve access and opportunity for all New Yorkers and foster healthy and vibrant communities. gothamfc.com/keepherinthegame













Rnax





2 Dove



Sports can be a powerful force in a girl's life. Yet, around the world, 45% of teenage girls are dropping out of sports—at twice the rate of boys—because of low body confidence.

That's why Dove, the world's biggest provider of self-esteem and body confidence education, has teamed up with Nike, the biggest champion of athletes and sport, to launch the Body Confident Sport program, to build body confidence for millions of girls and make sports a place where they feel like they belong.

Body Confident Sport is a first-of-its-kind, scientifically proven set of coaching tools to build body confidence in 11- to 17-year-old girls. It was co-developed by Dove and Nike, in partnership with world-renowned researchers and experts—the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West of England, and the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota-and includes input from girls and coaches from six countries: France, India, Japan, Mexico, the UK, and the US.

Body Confident Sport provides coaches with the materials they need to increase girls' body confidence, body image, and self-esteem through sports. The information in "Body Confident You!: Embracing Our Bodies On and Off the Pitch," found on pages 50-59, is based on Body Confident Sport. bodyconfidentsport.com









MORE BOOKS!

For more inspiring stories about amazing women and girls, and to get tried-and-true advice on growing up and pursuing your dreams, check out other Rebel Girls books.























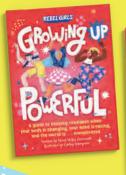






























For more stories about game-changing women and girls, scan here!





Rebel Girls, a certified B Corporation, is a global, multi-platform empowerment brand dedicated to helping raise the most inspired and confident generation of girls. The brand purposefully creates content, products, and experiences to empower Generation Alpha girls and equip them with the knowledge and tools they need to thrive. Because confident girls will radically transform the world.

With a growing community of 40 million self-identified Rebel Girls spanning more than 115 countries, the brand engages with Gen Alpha through its book series, premier app, events, and merchandise. To date, Rebel Girls has sold more than 11 million books in 62 languages and reached 85 million digital listens/views. Award recognition includes the New York Times bestseller list, 2022 Apple Design Award for Social Impact, 10 Webby Awards, and more.



REBEL GIRLS SPORT is a bold destination for tween and teen girls to inspire, build confidence, celebrate women athletes, and spark lifelong fandom through content, experiences, and products.

JOIN THE REBEL GIRLS COMMUNITY

Head to rebelgirls.com and join our email list for exclusive sneak peeks, new content drops, creative activities, and more. If you want to say hi or have any questions, email us at hello@rebelgirls.com. We love hearing from you.

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And for your daily dose of Rebel Girls, be sure to follow us on Instagram & Facebook @rebelgirls

BE FIERCE WITH GOTHAM FC!



Celebrate soccer and meet athletes at the top of their game. Dribble, shoot, and score with Esther González. Guard the goal with Ann-Katrin Berger. And unlock the secrets to staying strong with Midge Purce.

IN THIS BOOK, YOU'LL FIND:

- Exciting stories of soccer superstars
- Tried-and-true tips for being your best on and off the field
- Honest insights from aspiring athletes just like you
- Dynamic drills you can practice at home
- · Confidence-boosting tactics for being your best you!

ALWAYS BUILDING, NEVER FINISHED

Featuring tools for boosting body image from the Centre for Appearance Research and the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

Rebel Girls is a global, multi-platform empowerment brand dedicated to helping raise the most inspired and confident generation of girls.











