

# **GPS Based Goals**

**By Dalton Ruer and Joni Frei**

Cover art by Kate Ricchio

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**[www.GPSBasedGoals.com](http://www.GPSBasedGoals.com)**

**[www.CrossTrainingSoftball.com](http://www.CrossTrainingSoftball.com)**

## About the Authors



### Dalton Ruer

Coach Dalton has been using softball as a tool to build relationships with players and families since 1995. He started like most fathers coaching his own daughters and his passion for the game only continued to grow after their career's in the sport were over. Coach Dalton is involved in many things to help players grow both in and out of the sport. He conducts weekly encouragement and confidence building sessions under the guise of batting/slapping lessons. He regularly works with teams throughout the state of GA to help players overcome their fear of sliding and of diving and more importantly he helps players build a desire to want to win games by being aggressive on the bases instead of trying to avoid making outs. The highlight of his year occurs each June when he takes the field for 5 straight days of camp as a permanent staff member for Higher Ground Softball's Select skills camp which prepares young players to be college ready ball players. While he considers himself more of an instructor than a coach he does coach a team each summer as part of America's Team where he leads players in international competition. He is trying to reach players around through his website [www.CrossTrainingSoftball.com](http://www.CrossTrainingSoftball.com), through helpful encouraging videos on YouTube and through regular contributions through other high level softball websites. He is a staff writer for Fastpitch Softball Magazine which is part of the Fastpitch.TV family of tools geared towards helping players, coach and families grow in the sport where he contributes a

monthly written and video post.

This book is dedicated to my amazing wife Laura. She is amazingly selfless in regards to my time so that I can help players reach the dreams that they have in this sport. She challenges me at the points where I would burn myself out and supports me and encourages me to work harder at those times when I've been at a cross roads and would ordinarily want to give up. I am able to leave it all on the field mentally and physically because when I come home she's waiting with a loving embrace and supportive shoulders to help carry the load until I've recovered. I would like to thank my parents Ronald and Twila Ruer for the amazing guidance and support provided to me in my formidable years. They made it clear every single day growing up, and still do that they were incredibly proud of me. As I was beginning my career in the computer field they repeated offers to me that I should follow my heart and that if I failed I always had a home to come to. They let me pursue my dreams from very early on. I would also like to thank my former softball Coach Robert Seedhouse. I was more of a book worm at 12-13 than I was an athlete. But each summer Coach Seedhouse demonstrated true sacrifice and desire to see me improve. I can't remember how many hours he would stay after our teams practice to just hit balls at me whether at shortstop or lined up with my back against the fence. He drilled into me that if I wanted to get better I had to do two things: Get over my fear of the ball and put enough practice in that I would gain the confidence to play like a ball player. Those extra hours were only secondary to the hours he would spend talking to me off the field, taking me to Cleveland Indians ball games or taking me to watch him play ball. The most graphic lesson he taught me was when he was catching a game and a huge guy tried to run him over at the plate. He held onto the ball, got up and showed it to the umpire. Finished the game with a win. When we got to the car he said we need to go to the hospital before I take you home and proceeded to show me his thumb which was turned in a direction I had yet to see a thumb turn. I gasped "Your thumb is broke. How could you play that way?" His answer was simple, "you can't back down from someone that wants to run you over and you don't ever let them know that they've hurt you." Unconditional love, support, encouragement to pursue dreams, toughness to work on skills and fight to never give up ... yeah I learned it from them.

## Joni Frei

Joni graduated with a degree in Kinesiology and a minor in Health Sciences with Teacher Certification from Georgia College & State University. There she helped lead her team to a 2nd place finish at the NCAA National Tournament. Joni broke a number of school records at Georgia College & State University including homeruns, walks, RBI's and runs scored. She was the recipient of many prestigious academic and athletic accolades including NCAA National Tournament Team, All Conference Player Awards, University Athlete of the Year and Department of Health Sciences Student of The Year, her senior year. After graduation Joni moved to Europe to play in the Netherlands.

Upon the end of her competitive playing career she returned to the United States to pursue a career in coaching as an assistant with Kennesaw State University under Hall Of Fame Coach, Scott Whitlock. At Kennesaw State University Joni earned a Master's degree in Political Science with a concentration in Public Administration. Joni has coached at all levels of softball including serving as the head coach of the Austrian National Team, Assistant Coach for Division I Kennesaw State University, Assistant Coach for Division I Mercer University, Assistant Coach for NAIA Reinhardt College, Assistant Coach for Georgia Military College and Assistant Coach for Pace Academy.

She currently owns Beyond The White Lines Softball Academy in Vancouver B.C. Canada, is the head coach of the Canada Futures softball program and is a National Coaching Certification Program facilitator.

This book is dedicated to my mom, Karen Golling and my dad, Robert Frei for allowing me to take advantage of all of the opportunities that came my way while growing up. Your commitment to me, belief in me and the sacrifices you made to ensure my success will forever be appreciated. To my late brother, Shane Frei, thank you for being the best big brother a little sister could ever ask for. I'll always remember how unimpressed you were when I'd ask to "play too", yet you'd compromise your own "coolness" and let me play anyway! It was that platform at an early age that taught me how to compete. To my longest childhood friend Alana Peters, thanks for night time back yard "catch playing" and the black eyes that ensued. To my youth softball coaches Kevin Vogt & Dick Gomme, thank you! You are a huge part of why my passion for the game is still alive. Your time and commitment to me not only as one of your softball players, but also as one of your adopted daughters will always be remembered! You showed me what it means to be a "coach". To my high school field hockey and basketball coach, Jill Robinson, thank you for being the mentor and role model that I strive to mimic. To my college softball coach, Windy Thees, thank you for taking a chance on me! Having the opportunity to play for you and live the dream of being a collegiate athlete was the beginning of the reality I currently live. To my teammates throughout the years, thank you for being a part of my family! To my assistant coaches Dani Damel and Scott Ashworth, the truth is, you make me better. I am honoured that you would trust me to lead our ship. To the love of my life, Matthew Hermann, thank you for supporting my dreams, goals, passion and crazy ways! To Dalton Ruer a.k.a. "D-Money" you are clutch! Your passion and love for the game is inspiring. Your friendship is cherished! You make me want to be better! Thank you for this opportunity. To adversity, thank you! It is because of you that I am determined, prepared and confident. To the parents and volunteers that I have had the opportunity of working with, thank you for trusting my vision! Your support and selfless efforts are why our girls have had the opportunities and experiences they have. Most importantly, this book is dedicated to the many athletes that I have had the privilege and honour of coaching, teaching and mentoring. Thank you! Thank you for trusting me, empowering me and allowing me to be a part of your lives. I have learned far more from you than I will ever be able to teach you. Thank YOU!





## Introduction

This book is intended to be interactive. If you find yourself spending more time reading than doing, then something is wrong. When we ask you to take breaks and complete exercises here is a thought, stop reading and complete the exercises. You can't walk up to the plate and spout off to the umpire how much you know about hitting and get rewarded with bases. Likewise you aren't going to read your way to reaching your dreams.

As you are reading this as you come across words/phrases that are written in blue letters and shaded with a green background (like the one 1 paragraph below) they are hyperlinks that will take you to videos that will help emphasize that section of the book.

Coach Dalton and Coach Joni want you to know before you ever begin this process that they are ready to support you any way that they can. An online discussion forum section has been setup just for those of you doing the work in this book that you can access at the following link:

<http://www.crosstrainingsoftball.com/index.php/discussion-forum/?mingleforumaction=vforum&g=2.0>

You will also find tips there from other players going through the process and you should feel free to leave pointers on what you learn as you go through the process as well.

So what is GPS Based Goals all about? Well we wrote the whole book and are giving it to you for free we can't do it all for you. Get started with Chapter 1 and find out.

## Identifying your Destination



Images of Cinderella and her carriage begin to be embedded in young girl's minds at a very early age. The seed is planted for the fairy tale romance that allows you to escape the reality of a life you may not enjoy. That single dream sustains most girls throughout their youth and for many throughout their adult lives. They get their hearts broken over and over. They end up kissing lots of frogs hoping to turn them into their prince. But because of the "dream" they relentlessly pursue their vision of someone riding in and sweeping them off their feet. Unfortunately their counter parts who lose site of the fairy tale ending end up settling for living the rest of their lives out with the "frogs" because at least they have someone.

The question we have for you that will define everything else about your game is "What dream are you chasing for softball?" What's your fairy tale ending? The one that you are willing to pursue relentlessly. The one you will not give up on. The picture that sticks in your head that will make all of the extra conditioning, the blisters, the soreness, the late hours, the "frogs" you may have as a coach all pale in comparison once you reach it.

No bright lights. No fans screaming from the bleachers. No coaches around to impress. No parents around whom you need to repeat what they've told others since you started playing t-ball. No teammates around who've seen your errors in the past. Just the quietness of your own thoughts. What's your dream?

If you can even respond and admit you have a dream you are already far ahead of others. Many won't even admit to someone else that they have a dream, because they are afraid of being laughed at. "Silly girl that's just a fairy tale" They have this misconceived notion that their dreams have to be "realistic." They don't. They are your dreams. Not your parent's dreams. Not your coaches' dreams. Not your team mate's dreams. They are yours. You alone are allowed to dream anything that you want for your life.

*"Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true." - Leon J. Suenes*

I'm not talking about those fleeting thoughts that happen every now and then when we hear about someone else like "I dream of winning 3 Gold Medals like Leah O'Brien Amico" if you are a center fielder" Or you watch Monica Abbott pitch one day and say "I dream I could pitch like her." Those are fun things to imagine, but it's hard to do the work necessary to actually achieve them if you just "thought" about it one time.

What I'm referring to are those things that you can't stop thinking about. The ideas that come into your head all the time, when the television is off, the computer is off and the cell phone is recharging. "I've been dreaming of being the starting pitcher for my high school ever since I saw my first high school game when I was 7." "I've dreamed of being a college player since I was 13." "I've dreamed of wearing the colors of my country and representing my entire nation in the Olympics." Those kind of dreams.

So what about you? Do you think you could tell someone your dream? Are you afraid that others will laugh at you if you do share?

Or are you like others who are afraid of what they themselves think? Before they can even get the words out to others, they stop themselves because they doubt they can accomplish it. They can't even speak the words that go round and round in their head all the time because they allow their negative self talk to stop them before they come out.

Some people with dreams know that others would support them and encourage them and that's the problem. They feel so sure that they could never do what it is they are dreaming about, that they can't share because they simply feel like that would be one more failure in their lives. That then they would also be letting others down.

The reality is that many people have fears. Some are self imposed. Unfortunately some of our fears are based on years and years of experience in dealing with others. I could suggest you spend thousands of dollars and years on therapy to help you get over those fears if you are like either of those people. But I won't. Instead I'll simply suggest the following two very easy to implement concepts:

1. It is YOUR dream so feel free to keep it to yourself.
2. It is your DREAM so feel free to not believe in it. At least for now.

Seriously.

That's it.

Nothing profound. Just taking the pressure off.

But we do want you to admit YOUR DREAM. But only to yourself.

Don't tell your teachers, but the next page of this book is actually meant to be torn out. I want you to. In fact I insist that you rip the next page out of this book and make it the most important piece of paper you have ever touched in your life. Why? Because after you tear it out I want you to admit that you have a dream, and I want you to write that dream down on the piece of paper.

I'm not kidding. Get busy. Rip the next page of this book out and write your dream on it. Wait this is still electronic don't do that. Let's switch gears slightly print the next page of this book and write your dream on it. The biggest one that you have. If you dream of hitting a home run, or striking out 21 batters in a game, and being in the Olympics then write down your dream of being in the Olympics.

Don't cheat yourself either. If you dream of being a hero in the Women's College World Series don't just write down that you want to play college softball. If you are going to do this, then be fair. Write down your biggest dream and remember my 2 simple tips:

1. It is YOUR dream so feel free to keep it to yourself.
2. It is your DREAM so feel free to not believe in it. At least for now.

*"The difference between having a dream and living a dream is the people you surround yourself with." - Phil Tuttle*

[This page has been left blank intentionally. We did it to draw your attention to the fact that we are serious. Either print this page before you go any further or if you are really sneaky simply pick up a blank piece of paper. Either way don't read further until you have a piece of paper and you write the biggest dream that you have down on it.]



See that wasn't so bad was it?

But we aren't through yet. I need you to do 5 more very simple things:

1. Go and get a plastic sealable lunch bag, your bat bag and some duck tape.
2. Fold up the paper that has your dream on it.
3. Stick the paper inside the lunch bag
4. Seal the lunch bag
5. Use some duck tape to tape the baggie down inside your bat bag

1% of you ran and got what I asked you to, then came back and blindly followed all 5 steps. The other 99% of you are asking the obvious question "Why?" And that's a fair question. I'm asking you to do some pretty simple things, and yet I've said that piece of paper is going to become the most important piece of paper in your life so I better be able to answer it for you.

You see this game is full of girls playing softball. They show up. Some do what is asked of them. Others can't even do that most of the time. They "play" the game of softball and nothing more.

But every time you show up to practice or play you will be someone who starts to tie your dreams together with what you do. When you open your bat bag and you see that baggie taped down you are going to be reminded that you can either ignore the dream and just go back to being another "softball player." Or you can actually do something to get closer to making that dream a reality.

So pretty please with sugar on top. I want you to tape that piece of paper down inside your bat bag. (Or at least commit to doing it when dad or mom get home and show you where the duck tape is.)

The baggie is to ensure that it doesn't get ruined when you are out in the rain or throw your nasty cleats in it after 6 straight games. The duct tape is to ensure that nobody else can read it. By the time you start reading the next paragraph I want you to mentally have made the transition into someone who is pursuing her dream through softball. Until that happens nothing else in this book is going to matter so you might as well just close it right now and save yourself the time of reading it.

Joni and I work with young ladies and help them pursue their dreams through softball and that's what you've just become. Welcome to the family.

Why all of the drama about writing down a dream when the title of this book is GPS Based Goals? Well that should be pretty easy if you truly think about a GPS. In order for a Global Positioning System to work it has to know your "destination." We propose to you that that's exactly what your dream is. It's where you want to end up.

If you are just showing up at the field like so many other players going through the motions then you have no idea if it will come true or not so it's just a dream. But once you make the decision that you want your dream to become your destination you know where you are going.

At this point you still don't have to let anyone else know where you are heading, and you still don't have to believe you will get there. Just agree that you want your dream, your fairy tale softball romance, to be your destination.

Suddenly that little piece of paper provides a destination you can head towards. Every time you see that card taped in your bat bag you can make the decision "Do I want to head towards my destination or get off the road and just relax in that ice cream shop over there?"

## 2

### Committing to your Destination

The fact that you are reading this book and made it to chapter 2 is a pretty good sign that you really want to succeed and aren't all about pulling off the course for ice cream. You are going to need that desire because we are going to ask you to make a huge leap of faith in this chapter. We are going to ask you to ... gulp ... commit to the fact that you want your dream to actually come true, that you want to reach your destination. You are still welcome to have doubts that you will reach it at this point, that's still part of the deal. But we want you to commit to the idea that you want to reach it.

Before you make that commitment you need to understand that making a commitment is serious business and will require you to make some very serious choices.

To help you understand what it means to commit and to have to make really difficult choices to get to the destination you choose we are going to share with you a way to become a millionaire. One million dollars in your bank account. Seriously! That is something that lots of people say is their dream, and you may be one of them and we will show you a guaranteed way to get there.

I know what you are thinking "this is a probably a trick." Be assured there is no trick. But there is also no shortcut. There is no guaranteed way of becoming a millionaire short of making being committed to actually becoming one and making some very difficult choices long the way. So if you are up for a little exercise, go grab a pen and a calculator. You have nothing to lose and if you really get it you will be on your way to one million dollars.

For this exercise we are going to assume you are 22 and have just graduated college. Doesn't matter what your degree was, or if you changed majors 5 times and finally dropped out of college with no degree. Because for the sake of this drill we aren't going to say "you graduate and get a job for \$500,000 per year and can save tons of it." All we are going to ask is that you assume you can earn at least \$20,000 per year after taxes are taken out of your check. Working 40 hours per week, and having 2 weeks of vacation means you would need to make about \$12 per hour in order to earn that much money after taxes. Not unreasonable wages at all.

So lets assume you make \$20,000 after taxes, and we put every penny of that \$20,000 into some type of investment that will pay you 8% per year. That interest rate is also pretty reasonable for investments of the size that you are making. So after 1 year you would have earned \$1,600 in interest on the \$20,000 that you invested, and the total you then have after 1 year is \$21,600.

Below you will see a table with 4 columns. In the first column is your age. So for the age of 22 you need to write in \$20,000 in the second column, \$1,600 in the third column and finally \$21,600 in the last column.

Age	You deposit into your account	You get this much interest	At end of year you have this much money
22			

By now you are probably saying to yourself "There is no way I can make \$20,000 and put \$20,000 into the bank. What about my rent, my car payments, my new clothes, my tv, my cell phone, my ... my ... my

... my” See that’s just the problem that keeps all of the millions of others in the world from becoming millionaires. They say they “want” to be a millionaire, but their actions prove that what they really want more is to “have cool stuff” and to be “independent” to be “free to make their own choices” to “stop having to deal with their crazy parents.” So they talk about “dreaming” of being rich, while their choices prove that they’d rather be “free but in debt” all of their lives.

Age	You deposit into your account	You get this much interest	At end of year you have this much money
22	\$20,000.00	\$1,600.00	\$21,600.00
23			
24			

Let’s pretend you get passed those things and continue to live at home by your parent’s rules and continue our chart. We’ll assume that you’re a terrible worker and get no raise at all. Don’t complain to us, complain to your boss. So in year 23 write in your \$20,000. In the third column how much interest do you make that year? Now here is the beauty of interest. They aren’t going to pay you the same \$1,600 they did in year 1, they are actually going to pay you \$3,328. That’s 8% interest on the \$21,600 from year 22, plus the \$20,000 you earned this year or the \$41,600. Now add all that up and by the end of year 23 you have \$44,928 in your account. So jot that down.

*"A winner is someone who sets their goals, commits themselves to those goals and then pursues their goals with all the ability that God has given them. That requires someone who believes in himself or herself, who will make self-sacrifices, work hard, and maintain the determination to perform at the best of their ability." C. Leeman Bennett*

You start year 24, and for whatever reason you continue to only earn the same amount of money. So add your \$20,000 on year 24. Before you calculate the interest for that year, keep in mind that they are going to pay you that 8% on all \$64,928 you have in your account (last years total + your \$20,000.) Do the math  $\$64,928 * .08$  (8 percent) and add that to the chart then add them up and put the total in the last column. What do you have now after 3 years?

If you did your math correctly you will find that after that year you will have \$70,122.24 in your account. Not a million dollars yet, but not a bad savings account for someone who doesn’t earn very much money. While it may be difficult to imagine, keep playing along for just a little while longer. Continue the chart for years 25, 26 and 27 and see what you end up. Remember your interest each year is calculated on what you had in your account the year before plus your \$20,000 deposit the year you are on.

Age	You deposit into your account	You get this much interest	At end of year you have this much money
22	\$20,000	\$1,600.00	\$21,600.00
23	\$20,000	\$3,328.00	\$44,928.00
24	\$20,000	\$5,194.24	\$70,122.24
25			
26			
27			

If you did your math correctly on year 27 you made \$11,737.49 that year. Do you realize that you are making more than half of your total annual salary now just by having the money sitting there in the account. Do you get that? It’s snowballing now. Your total balance and your interest are growing really quickly now. Yes we know mom and dad are driving you crazy.

We know you want to buy that iPhone Version 87, but let's keep playing the game for just 3 more years. Just 3 more years and magic is going to happen for you. Can you do that? Do the math for years 28, 29 and 30.

Age	You deposit into your account	You get this much interest	At end of year you have this much money
22	\$20,000	\$1,600.00	\$21,600.00
23	\$20,000	\$3,328.00	\$44,928.00
24	\$20,000	\$5,194.24	\$70,122.24
25	\$20,000	\$7,209.78	\$97,332.02
26	\$20,000	\$9,386.56	\$126,718.58
27	\$20,000	\$11,737.49	\$158,456.07
28			
29			
30			

So what did you notice about the amount of interest you made on year 30? Did you see that you are making as much money in interest as you were making. They are handing you your entire salary just for having the money in your account.

Age	You deposit into your account	You get this much interest	At end of year you have this much money
22	\$20,000	\$1,600.00	\$21,600.00
23	\$20,000	\$3,328.00	\$44,928.00
24	\$20,000	\$5,194.24	\$70,122.24
25	\$20,000	\$7,209.78	\$97,332.02
26	\$20,000	\$9,386.56	\$126,718.58
27	\$20,000	\$11,737.49	\$158,456.07
28	\$20,000	\$14,276.49	\$192,732.55
29	\$20,000	\$17,018.60	\$229,751.16
30	\$20,000	\$19,980.09	\$269,731.25

We have good news for you. The point when your money is working for you, is the point at which you can finally leave home and stop saving. You don't need to save anymore, because that pile of money is doing all of the work for you. No kidding. At the age of 30 you have now saved every penny you ever need to save for the rest of your life. You've made all of the sacrifice you will ever have to make for the rest of your life.

At this point you may be thinking to yourself this is ridiculous. There is no way I could stay at home this long. Of course I will get a raise. I will have a good job. What if I meet Mr. Right and I want to get married? All reasonable thoughts. If you've lost the ability to believe you could live at home until your 30 and save every penny you make that's ok. All you need to do is commit to saving the \$20,000 per year. Every year. No excuses. If you can commit to that thought then put your calculator away now and watch what continues to happen with that money as it works hard for you.

31	\$0.00	\$23,178.50	\$292,909.75
32	\$0.00	\$23,432.78	\$316,342.53
33	\$0.00	\$25,307.40	\$341,649.93
34	\$0.00	\$27,331.99	\$368,981.93
35	\$0.00	\$29,518.55	\$398,500.48

36	\$0.00	\$31,880.04	\$430,380.52
37	\$0.00	\$34,430.44	\$464,810.96
38	\$0.00	\$37,184.88	\$501,995.84
39	\$0.00	\$40,159.67	\$542,155.50
40	\$0.00	\$43,372.44	\$585,527.94
41	\$0.00	\$46,842.24	\$632,370.18
42	\$0.00	\$50,589.61	\$682,959.79
43	\$0.00	\$54,636.78	\$737,596.58
44	\$0.00	\$59,007.73	\$796,604.30
45	\$0.00	\$63,728.34	\$860,332.65
46	\$0.00	\$68,826.61	\$929,159.26

What magically happens when you turn 47. You sacrificed, in a big way for 9 years. You lived at home and followed your parents rules for 9 years. You watched your friends buy the latest this, and the coolest that. You put your needs on hold, while they spent everything that they made. The home. The car. The vacations. Was it worth it. It depends on your perspective. Because if you wanted to become a millionaire. You “dreamed” of being a millionaire. Here is what happens on your 47’th birthday.

47	\$0.00	\$74,332.74	<b>\$1,003,492.00</b>
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You did it. You are a millionaire.

You didn’t need a high paying job. You didn’t even need a raise.

You didn’t need to hit the lottery. All you needed to do was make the sacrifice.

That’s the whole point about any dream.

There are always millions of reasons why others don’t succeed. Reasons why you should give up your dream. There are always choices that have to be made. Hard choices. Choices you don’t want to have to make. But when you are willing to really commit. To make the sacrifice. Those dreams start getting closer and closer and closer.

Would your parents really let you stay at home until you are 30? Would they keep paying for your food? Would they pay for your gas? Don’t they want you to move out and become responsible? They probably do want you to become responsible. If you promised them you would follow their rules and sacrifice your own freedom in order to save every penny you made to ensure the legacy of your future children, their grand children, they just might see that as being responsible. They will be skeptical at first. Just like you will be. But when you turn 25 and have the amount of money in your account that you had planned, both of you will begin really believing that you will hit your dream.

The question is ... is your dream worth committing to? Is it worth it? Is it worth the sacrifices you may have to make to ensure that it comes true and that you do in fact reach your destination. Remember you can still have doubts that you can accomplish it. So here it is, what could be the turning point in your life ... now that you’ve written your dream will you commit to it?

Question: In a bacon-and-egg breakfast, what's the difference between the Chicken and the Pig?

Answer: *The Chicken is involved, but the Pig is committed!*

### 3

## Getting your Directions

Have you ever sat through a team meeting and your coach handed you a piece of paper and said “Ok I’m going to give you 15 minutes to write down 5 goals for this season?”

The older girls on the team have heard the goals in the past that the coach has commented on so they have the advantage and they write something similar. But the newer players struggle to think. They start fidgeting. Asking each other “what are you going to write?”

We propose to you that those kind of team meetings, and goals that you write down in a 15 minute timeframe serve little purpose. You see the dictionary defines a goal in this way:

Goal: [gohl] noun - The result or achievement toward which effort is directed; aim; end.

If a goal is intended to get you to an intended result; an achievement; aim you; get you to a desired end; then you better have first identified what you are aiming at. Right?

If you don’t know where you are going then any path will take you there. If I just write down “Run 10 miles north, turn right, jog 20 miles to the east.” The coach might say “great job, you are committed to going 30 miles.” Everyone should be more like you. But maybe being there won’t mean a thing to me, because my dream, the place I always wanted to end up was 10 miles southwest of where I am.

But when you know exactly where you want to end up, and are committed to getting there then goals are the steps that you need to take to get there. They are just like the directions that you get out of a GPS after you have entered your destination. They are the incremental steps that get you to your destination. But more than that they are the incremental steps that help you gain confidence you will get there.

Over and over you’ve been told you don’t have to believe you will get there yet, because doubts are normal. But if you do commit to your dream and are willing to work hard to get there, then goals are those incremental directions that will get you there and help you build your confidence that you will arrive where you want to.

Imagine starting out with the daunting task of walking from one end of the United States to the other. It sounds like a great goal. A goal that a coach would say “woo-hoo” to. It’s reasonable that people would doubt that they could ever finish, and that many would give up if they just walked out of their house and started walking. Those that are a little tough might make it a few miles from their house and then return when it starts to rain. Those that are really competitive might make it until it starts to snow. If you didn’t really want to walk across the entire country ... you will give up.

*"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."*  
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your goals have to be aligned with the dream that you want to achieve. If you really wanted to accomplish that feat then you would spend the time to figure out ways to break the trip up before you ever get started. You wouldn’t just lace up your shoes and head out the door in order to appear tough.

You might start by finding out how many miles it really is. Did you know that Maine to California is 3,300 miles. Wow that’s a lot of miles, and it would only be natural that you aren’t sure if it can be done.



You might then figure out how many miles you can walk in a day. Most people can comfortably walk about 3 miles an hour. So if they walked 10 hours per day and let their bodies rest the other 14 hours per day they could travel 30 miles per day.

You would then get some directions on paper from a GPS, that are broken up in increments of 30 miles per day and when you chart that course you will see it would take 110 days. While 110 days is a big number, it's less than 4 months. It's less than the amount of time you spend for 1 spring softball season. Suddenly the impossible, now seems hard but entirely manageable.

Imagine what happens to your confidence at the end of the first day when you look at your directions and realize that you needed to go 30 miles today and you did it. Now you only have 109 to go and you've turned impossible, into just hard work.

Imagine what happens to your confidence on day 54 and you are really tired but you look at your list of directions and realize that you are now half way to your destination.

How much more will you believe you can make it all the way across the entire United States after day 100 than you did before you left?

In just the same way your belief that you will reach your dream is going to continue to increase as you identify the goals, the directions to get there, and begin seeing your progress on that journey. But just like a trip across the entire country, your dream right now can seem like it would be impossible. That's ok.

That's precisely what goals are for. They are to help you break up impossible into manageable, doable, accomplishable, "I got this" sized bits. And each time you kick the butt of one of those bits your confidence continues to grow. Continues to fuel your drive that you are now even closer to where you ultimately want to be.

About this point you should be pretty charged up, because while a long way off you might actually believe for the first time in your life that you can reach your dream. So how do you get started writing goals? Not the "write down 5 things in 15 minutes" kind that you forget by the end of the season but rather the ones that you are going to refer to for the next several years. The ones that will be your road map.

Step 1 is to solidify your destination. It's in your head all of the time and you have it written down and taped in your bat bag. Right? But right now it's very likely like heading across the country to just some random spot in California. Do you really want to make a grueling 110 day track across the country and just end up anywhere in California? What you have to do is solidify exactly what achieving your dream would look like.

The easiest way to do that is to picture what others look like who have accomplished the same dream you have. Those who have already reached the destination you have in mind. Those who have achieved what you are trying to achieve. How would you describe them in terms related to the game?

If this wasn't your dream, and you didn't really care about whether you accomplish it or not you could just take your best guess as to what things they've done to get where you want to be. But if you are really committed to the fact that you do want to reach your destination then your goals just might ... gulp ... require you to do some research. What??? This isn't school.

You are absolutely right it isn't school. It's more important than school, it's your lifelong dream.

You can't honestly expect to sit down and in 10 minutes write goals that are going to take you some where amazing unless you spend the time to find out where it is you really want to go.

The truly amazing thing is that most others who've accomplished their dreams are very normal, very down to earth, very willing to help others. Find them online and then write to them, ask them questions, pick their brains. Go to camps where they are doing instruction. Talk to others that know them best. Find out what traits separate them from everyone else.

Some of the directions, goals, are going to be easy ones to research and write down. Imagine that your dream is to play for the best fictional softball program in the world, East Podunk University. East Podunk is no different than any other softball program and they place a lot of emphasis on hitting which is good because hitting has all kinds of statistics that are recorded and you can track them. As you do your research into those statistics you discover that the minimum batting average for every incoming freshman the past 5 years was .473 their senior season in high school. Pretty high, but remember they are the best fictional school in the country and they only accept the very elite.

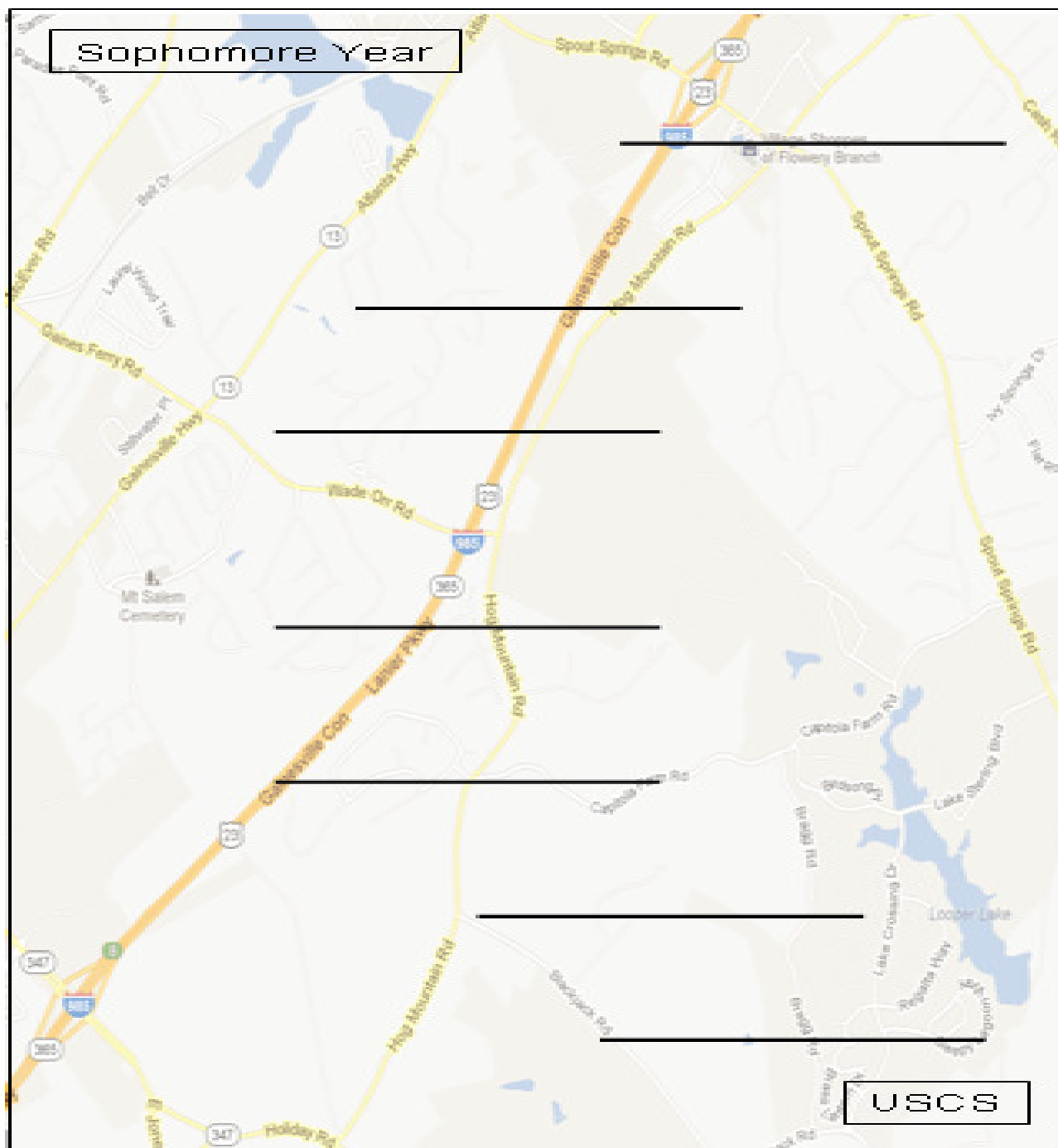
There are many complicated factors that go into recruiting players, so just hitting .473 alone isn't what got any of those fictional players recruited to that fictional school. By the very definition of the word if what you write down isn't going to help you achieve, get you to an end, then it isn't really a goal. So it would be silly for you to write down a batting average goal of .350 because that isn't going to be enough to get you into East Podunk University.

We aren't trying to imply that every goal you need to write down is going to be handed to you because they aren't. Some are much more difficult to figure out. At this point you don't need to over think the difficult ones or worry about the goals you don't know. Start with the ones you can identify. Start by taking some guesses about general things that you think would certainly be required.

Let's do a practice run together. There is a fictional player named Suzy Smith who is a pitcher. Suzy is currently a high school sophomore whose dream is to pitch in the Universal Softball Championship Series (USCS) with East Podunk University when she's a senior at the school.

*"I've worked to hard and too long to let anything stand in the way of my goals. I will not let my teammates down and I will not let myself down."* Mia Hamm

On the next page you are going to see a map that shows you where Suzy is now and where she ultimately wants to be with some blank lines along the way. Steps that get her from her sophomore year to the USCS. Those steps are the goals that will get her there. Before looking at the suggestions that follow, spend some time imagining what those steps might be and write them in. What are the most obvious things that pitchers are evaluated on? What are some of the more complicated things? Don't worry about filling in all of the lines, and don't hesitate to draw your own lines in if you have more steps Suzy can take. But take the time to really think it through. What steps can't Suzy take to get her from her sophomore year in high school to the Universal Softball Championship Series her senior year at East Podunk University?



If you are like most athletes that is not a very easy drill for two reasons:

1. You have never really learned what goals were or how to write them.
2. You may have assumed that fate just randomly chooses those who will accomplish their dreams and those who won't.

The entire point of this book is to help you ensure that when all is said and done in your career, there will be more done than said. In other words you will have reached your dream instead of sharing stories about what your dream was for the rest of your life.

The easiest way to start working on goals is to actually envision them as steps. So the first thing you could do is break the lines into 2 groups separated by Suzy entering her freshman year at East Podunk

University. Yes it's really that simple. She can't possibly pitch the championship game her senior year, if she never starts her freshman year.

Now let's take just one step back from that mid point. One small very simple step. A logical one that has to be taken. Can you guess what that is?

If you guessed that the step just before that one is Suzy being offered a position to play for East Podunk University or being accepted into the school you are perfectly on track. She can't start her freshman year if she isn't offered a spot on the team and isn't accepted into the school. Is that cheating, or is that merely logical?

It would only follow that one of the goals for Suzy prior to that one would be "make initial contact with Coach at East Podunk University".

Before we finish going through this would be an important place to stop and re-emphasize the importance of these steps. What they have to do with you. As a sophomore Suzy probably doesn't believe that her dream of playing in the USCS will come true. But imagine how those negative thoughts in her head will start becoming more positive when she starts completing each of those goals.

More importantly if you can chart your goals like the steps we are taking for Suzy how much more will you begin to believe that you can make your dreams come true? How much more will you put into doing the work and making them come true?

Back to our fictional pitcher Suzy. In order for Suzy to be accepted into the school what must happen? That whole application process thing. What else? She has to take those pesky admission tests and have the scores sent to them. She has to earn grades good enough to be accepted. In other words she has to be "academically eligible" to qualify as a student first, so that she can have a chance as a "student athlete."

What is it going to take for the coach to offer her a position? Oh yeah that whole make the ball dance after it leaves her hand and before arriving in the catcher's glove. She better learn some of those pitches and be able to throw them with confidence. But which ones should she learn? The polka? The tango? The waltz? All of them? The one that is written about the most on blog sites? The ones that she likes the most? Or is this where research might really be needed?

What if she finds out that for the past 5 years every starting pitcher in the USCS can make the ball do a really gorgeous fox trot on the way to the catcher's mitt but she's been working on that pitch with her coach for the past 2 years and it still looks awful? Maybe she will need a goal of finding a pitching coach that can teach her that pitch correctly. Or maybe she will have to be honest and admit that she never liked that pitch so she really never practiced it outside of her lessons and set a goal of honestly putting forth the effort. Then setting a goal for herself that in 2 tournaments she will throw that pitch at least 2 times per inning.

When you got started you probably thought there is no way to set a goal for each of those blank lines, but now you probably realize that there aren't nearly enough lines. Now we need to start filling in those lines after she's started her freshman year. What would those goals be?

Earning a starting spot in the rotation would be nice right? Just because Suzy got into the school doesn't mean she'll be the one pitching.

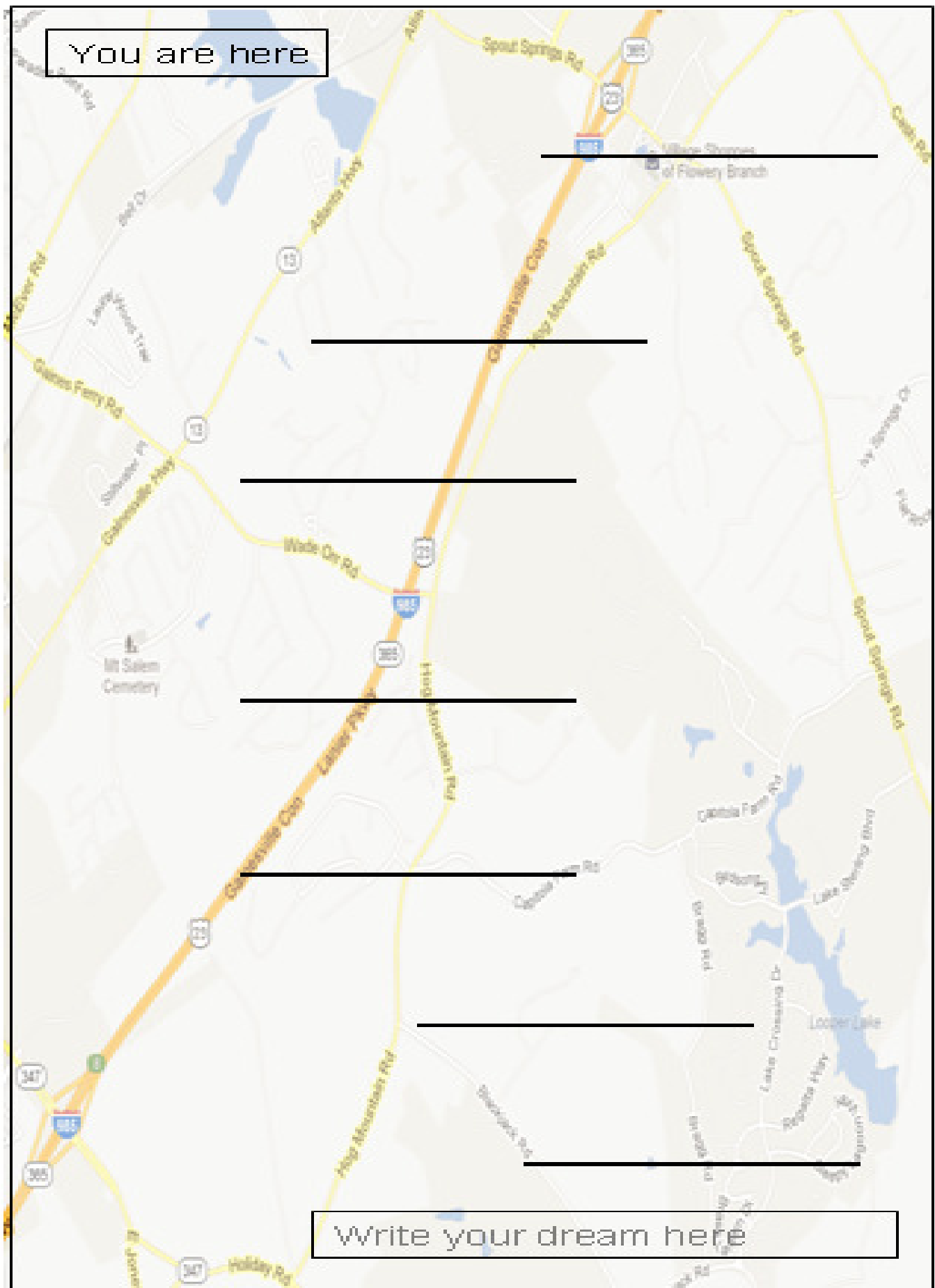
A more complicated one that you may or may not understand might be a goal for **leadership** qualities. If she is going to take the team to the USCS she better figure out how to lead college level ball players.

Another complicated one that you may not be aware of is how much pounding your body takes as a college athlete. Playing games on Saturday and Sunday is one thing. But practicing 2, 3, 4 hours a day 3-4 days a week, plus conditioning and playing the rest puts a lot of stress on your body. Suzy will have to set a goal of learning how to properly take care of her body so that it doesn't give out on her.

*"If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can't, you're right" -- Henry Ford*

Again the important thing isn't so much exactly what those steps, those goals, are right now for Suzy or for you. The important thing is that you understand that just like with a GPS those goals are the directions that will get you to your destination. They will provide that confidence you need in knowing that you are on the right path each time you accomplish one of them. Each one you complete will give you more fuel to work even harder to complete the remaining goals.

As a young lady pursuing her dream in softball what are your goals? What steps will get you from where you are right now to your dream? Write them down. Write your dream (destination) in the bottom rectangle and then start filling in the blanks. Don't wait. Write them down now.





## Ensure your directions are S.M.A.R.T.

While GPS devices are wonderful inventions and help a great deal when you are behind the wheel driving somewhere you haven't been they have one huge flaw. Something that can drive you bonkers when you encounter it. Do you know what that is?

It's the fact that after you plug in your destination it just starts out by giving the directions for your first turn. It doesn't show you the big picture of where you are heading. So if you start inputting a street name "Peachtree" and it guesses what the rest of it is say "Peachtree Street NE" and you just blindly accept the directions it yields you may very well end up where you didn't really want to go and by the time you realize it it's too late to get back on track to "Peachtree Drive SW." Like the infamous Bugs Bunny frequently said in his cartoon "I should have made a left turn in Albuquerque."

It's important even when using a magical GPS device to ensure that you are using smart directions by having the big picture of where they are taking you. Likewise just because you've now written down goals doesn't ensure that they are S.M.A.R.T. ones. Notice that the word is an acronym and isn't implying anything about your intellect.

The acronym S.M.A.R.T. has been around for a long time. But like so many other things the problem is in the lack of application and not the lack of information being available. So in this chapter we are going to elaborate on each aspect of S.M.A.R.T. goals, apply our own spin to the acronym and ask you to really spend the time applying them to the goals/directions you've already written down.

### S – Specific

Specific means that the goal must be precise. Someone else would have to understand it without question. It has to be exact. You may be asking yourself why? And that's a fair question. Believe it or not some people might make emotional decisions as to whether or not they have achieved their goal. Not you of course, just others out there in the world in general. If the goal isn't specific they might evaluate their success or failure based on the results of only the last swing, last pitch, last throw or last catch. Can you believe that?

One of the easiest ways to learn something new is to see bad examples. Unfortunately the bad example that you are about to read may very well be something you've heard every one of your teammates say. Something your parents have said you should do. Something you may have actually written down. But here goes, here is a goal that is not specific: "I want to be a better hitter."

Even sounding that out makes our ears hurt. What does "better" even mean? Can't you just see the millions who have stated that before you making completely inaccurate assessments of whether or not they completed that goal? Meet our fictional goal setter Sally and the predicament she is in. Championship game. Bottom of the seventh inning. Bases loaded. Two outs. Her team is trailing by 1 run. Fans are going crazy in the stands. She strikes out.

*"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the duty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are the dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes to make it possible."* T.E. Lawrence

Do you see how her emotions just might cloud her judgment in determining if she was now a “better hitter” than she was at the beginning of the season. Likewise, imagine that the situation was reversed and she came through with a bases loaded double.

While it isn’t even fair to look at that one isolated at bat in determining success or failure that is precisely the kind of unfair evaluation that a goal like “I want to be a better hitter” lends itself to. Specific goals on the other hand stop you from making emotional decisions, and those that are based on one success or one failure. They are written in such a way that if you shared them with 100 people. And shared the results with 100 people. They would all evaluate your success/failure in the same manner.

If Sally’s goal was stated as “I want to be able to approach the plate in pressure situations without gripping the bat like it was the ledge of a mountain I was hanging from” then everyone at the game would say she failed if the umpire had to call time out when she snapped the bat in half with her hands because she gripped it to tight. The fact that she got a triple after she borrowed a teammates bat wouldn’t matter. Likewise if they saw her rhythm, saw that she was able to lay off the low outside junk, and finally struck out on a high rise ball after fouling off 6 straight 3-2 count pitches, then she did in fact succeed in her goal, despite the lack of a hit in that 1 isolated emotional incident.

Don’t just say your goal is to go somewhere warm if you really want to be laying in the sand at a particular resort in the Caribbean. Or else you may find yourself in a tanning booth in Alaska. Likewise your softball goals have to be specific in order to ensure that they are in fact steps that will get you to your dream.

## **M – Measurable**

One easy way that you can ensure you will measure your success/failure fairly is to ensure that you can take the inverse of the 4<sup>th</sup> dimensional square root of the circumference of the total angle of the values. Just kidding the math doesn’t have to be so complicated that only Albert Einstein could figure it out. But your goals do have to be measurable. They have to have those pesky numbers associated with them in some form or another so that you can evaluate your success/failure based on them.

“I want to improve my batting average this year” qualifies as being specific and is a gajillion times better than “I want to be a better hitter.” If it was 1 percent better there are those who might say “Well it appears that every average on the team went up about 20 percent because we had a different scorekeeper this year and since you only went up 1 percent, I’m not sure you really improved.

Put a number to it that is impossible to refute. Remember that your goals are not just things to write on paper that meet the minimum requirements. You are writing them to ensure that you reach your dream. After all how many years will it then take you to go from the .125 batting average you had last year to that .473 needed for East Podunk University if you just “improve over last year” and 1 percent qualifies you to succeed in achieving your goal.

Assigning a number to each of your goals adds a whole new layer of undeniable accountability. It takes your goals from “everyone who watches me will judge me the same” to “everyone who reads about my goal and my results will judge me the same.” You either have a batting average at the end of the season of .380 or it is higher or lower. No guess work.

## A – Achievable by you

All that really means is that it's realistic for you to be able to achieve it. But in order to make an acronym work sometimes we have to use more complicated phrases. Insert a smiley face emoticon in your head to imagine that was a text message.

Seriously, it's important as you refine your goals and you make them specific, and you make them measurable that you keep them realistic for you. Your dream didn't have to be realistic but your goals do.

If you could hit the ball 832.7 feet you would get an offer to play for any softball program in the country. The head coach might even volunteer to carry your bat bag for you and bake you homemade chocolate chip cookies. But writing a goal like that down would be useless if you studied the history of this game at all. While there is a chance that you are stronger than Crystl Bustos. You may even work harder than Crystl Bustos. Your daddy may have bought you a bat better than the one that Crystl used. But the fact that she is considered to be the strongest hitter in the game and her longest was only 460 feet I don't like the odds of you realistically being able to beat her mark by hitting it 832.7 feet.

*"Aerodynamically the bumble bee shouldn't be able to fly, but the bumble bee doesn't know that so it goes on flying anyway"* Mary Kay Ash

This is another area of the goal setting process where you have to do some research in order to find out what is achievable. Then judge yourself according to where you are now compared to those achievements in order to come up with what is achievable by you. Don't misinterpret that as meaning that you should set specific, measurable goals that are easy to achieve. If you want to hit further than Crystl and be more feared than she is then go for it. Challenge how she did it. Find new ways to drive the ball that she didn't have at her disposal and beat her record. Eventually someone will hit the ball harder than her, but realistically that will be an incremental step forward they aren't going to double her mark. And unless you are reading this at the age 4 you probably don't have enough time to work hard enough and gain enough knowledge and confidence to do it yourself.

*"I have always tried to go a step past wherever people expected me to end up."* Beverly Sills

Read the words carefully again "Achievable by you." Does that imply any limitation that you have to be able to achieve it by you with the tools you currently have? Your current strength? Your current speed? Your current abilities as a leader? Your current level of confidence?

Clearly we have stated over and over that like directions coming out of a GPS your goals are the road map that will get you to your dream. But unless you dream of laying in a bed and taking a nap your dream should challenge you to grow. This like other aspects of your goals needs to challenge you. Not cause you to become super human and break the laws of physics, but challenge you to grow. So they need to be achievable by you ... after pushing yourself to grow your God given gifts.

## R – Reach forward

The only goal we dislike hearing more than “I want to become a better hitter” is “I want to strike out less this year than I did last year.”

All that statement does is help you avoid something negative, it does not help you accomplish a single thing. Would it make any sense for a person to state “My dream is to walk the entire Appalachian Trail” but then state that their goal as “I want to avoid sweating, or getting any blisters, or having my legs ever be sore, or ever get thirsty?” Of course not.

Typically goals that are written to avoid something negative come from a desire to avoid negative consequences like mom and dad yelling. They don’t come from a desire to accomplish something positive. They don’t come from a sincere desire to want to reach a dream. You simply can’t walk up to the plate with a fear in your head wanting to avoid striking out if you expect to play at any high level of competition. As instructors and coaches we tend to see girls that want to avoid striking out succeed very little in getting on base. Instead of attacking the ball, those players tend to try and be goalies waiting until the last possible second, taking slow, weak swings, only intended to keep the ball out of the catchers mitt.

<p><i>“The bravest sight in the world is to see a great man struggling against adversity”</i> Seneca</p>
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A pitcher could succeed in “not allowing any home runs” by walking everyone.

An outfielder could succeed in “not dropping any catches” by never getting in a position close enough to catch the ball.

Your goals absolutely have to inspire you to succeed in something.

Your goals absolutely have to push through where you currently are in your talent.

Your goals absolutely have to help increase your desire to work hard in order to achieve them.

Your goals absolutely have to help you build your confidence as you achieve them.

Just as you can’t possibly make a great omelet if your goal is to avoid breaking any eggs you can’t succeed if your goal is to avoid failure.

Simply put your goals cannot allow you to retreat they must cause you to reach forward.

Simply put your goals cannot allow you to retreat they must cause you to reach forward.

Just in case you thought that was a copy/paste mistake here it is again to ensure you don’t miss this point:

Simply put your goals cannot allow you to retreat they must cause you to reach forward.

If there is any element of your game that you know is being controlled by fear of failure, then you need to write down a goal of overcoming that fear. “I will play at East Podunk University in 4 years. I will crush the ball in order to get seen and recruited as demonstrated through a slugging percentage of .650. As I begin driving the ball I will cause my parents to change the “not again” screams into screams like “yeah she killed another one.”

## T – Time based

They say that time heals all wounds. They say that you can never go back in time. They say that time is the most expensive thing in this world. Time is important in life and it's also a very important aspect of goals. Unfortunately time is the one aspect of goal setting that is often overlooked.

Remember the key to always remember about goals is that they are supposed to be points along the way that get you to your dream. They are supposed to continually help fuel your desire to work hard as you build confidence that you are going in the right direction and you will accomplish your dream. However not placing a deadline on a goal like "I want to have a batting average of .475" while specific, measurable, achievable by you and causes you to reach forward" ignores the fact that it will take time.

If you don't establish any time line for that goal then while you could very well move forward 1 or 2 percent per year, you will not reach the goal before you have long since missed the window of time to achieve your dream. Thus it was a terrible goal because it didn't serve its purpose.

If your current batting average is .125, having a goal of .475 and expecting that in your head you will accomplish it this season probably breaks the rule of being "achievable by you" because the odds are not very good that you will go from a weak hitter to a great hitter in 2-3 months. Not impossible, just improbable.

Instead of just trying to attack the entire difference between .125 and .475 in 1 season break it up. Use time to your advantage so that the goals help you instead of destroying your confidence. If you have 3 years before you will need to leave for East Podunk University then do the math and realize that instead of improving .350 in 1 season, you really have 3 full years. That means that you only need to improve your batting average by .116 each year. So you would have 3 goals: "I want to bat .241 12 months from now." "I want to bat .357 24 months from now." "I want to bat .475 36 months from now."

Not so scary after all. Each year you can reward yourself by achieving a goal. In fact who said your goals have to be a full year out in time. You have both a HS season and a travel ball season so why not split the goals up into those seasons. That means each of your goals would only require a .058 improvement in your batting average.

*"If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."* Henry David Thoreau.

The big cheeses that come up with the fancy sayings would tell you that your overall goal of trying to hit .475 is called a Long Term Goal. That just means that they are longer in time than you can realistically benefit from. But they provide the target for you to keep shooting for. Typically long term goals are measured in multiple years.

You year by year goals are called Mid Term Goals. That means that they are mid-points that mark your progress to ensure that you are on course. Points that are closer in time and manageable for you to keep working towards. Typically mid term goals are measured in relation to a single year, or close to an entire year.

There is also another term that they use all the time which is Short Term Goals. Short term goals are those that are set for a very small amount of time. One that is very manageable for your mind to focus on

because the time frame is small enough to quickly compare yourself to where you are currently at.

The time length for short term goals varies from athlete to athlete. If you are the type of person that loses attention easily you want to keep your short term goals to very small increments of time. If you can push yourself and stay focused longer your short term goal time frames may be as long as 2-3 months. Essentially it takes you 3 weeks to break an old habit, and 3 weeks to secure a new habit. Followed by a few weeks time to ensure that you have mastered that new habit.

Of all the key terms relating to time the most important; The one that you better not avoid; The one that will change everything about your future is the term Immediate. That word is defined as

Adjective - Im-mee-dee-it “occurring or accomplished without delay; instant.” Also “following or preceding without a lapse of time.”

In terms that anyone should be able to understand it means “If you want to reach your dream then identify what you can do right now to start moving in that direction.”

If you are batting .125 today, then what you are doing isn’t working. In order to get to .475 in 3 years you better get some help. So your first goal could be “I want to find 5 different batting coaches in the next 2 days.” A second one might be “I want to visit each of the 5 batting coaches within 2 weeks and make the decision who I think will help me the most.”

In chapter 3 we asked you to spend time writing out your goals. Your next step is to evaluate those that you have written against the 5 principles of the acronym S.M.A.R.T. using the chart that follows. If the goal doesn’t meet all 5 of the criteria then rewrite the goal in a way that does.

Some of your goals will lend themselves perfectly to breaking them up into a long range, mid term and short term version of them. So do that as well.

In the chart there are a couple of goals already written out as illustrations to help you see that some things you hear a lot do fit some of the criteria but don’t meet all of them and should be rewritten. Remember the key for every goal you come up with is that you believe in it. You trust that if you follow your plans and work hard to accomplish the goals. You will accomplish your dream. Which is exactly what we do with a GPS.

Once you write each one you also need to commit that you will do everything you possibly can to ensuring that you meet it. If you are batting .125 right now and write down that you want to bat .475 but don’t do anything different than what you are doing right now the odds aren’t good you are going to magically accomplish the goal. Commit that you will put the effort into making each goal come true, one at a time.



T = True the goal meets the criteria; F = False the goal does not meet the criteria

[illegible]

**S – Specific** – Is your goal precise? Would others know exactly what you mean?

**M – Measurable** – Is there a number with it that can be measured?

A – Achievable by you – Is it realistic that you can accomplish it?

R – Reach forward – Is it forcing you to move forward or just helping you avoid something negative?

T – Time based – Is there a defined time period when you measure your success of the goal?

## 5

### Locating your Starting Point

Step 2 in using your “GPS” to get directions to reach your dreams might be the hardest of all. Unlike a real GPS device that knows where you are at all times you need to be able to identify your starting point. That’s not always easy to do because you have to be perfectly honest about where you are right now. You may wish you were 1 practice away from your dream, but you have to be honest or the directions and path you take won’t get you to where you ultimately want to be.

In just the same way that we tend to hide our dreams from others we often want to hide our lack of confidence in ourselves and our lack of knowledge about the game that we love.

Often times we read goals like “I want to get better hitting.” “I want to get better pitching.” “I want to throw harder.” While honest, these goals indicate a complete lack of understanding of where the player truly is or what they would really look like when they’ve gotten to their dream. Because it would only make sense that if they knew what they were doing wrong, and knew how to be better, they would be.

While you can go to the store and buy a lot of things, you can’t buy a case of “being better.” Unfortunately you can’t borrow “just a little bit better” from your teammates either.

To get “better” to really improve you have to really dig deep, figure out where you are in your progression, and identify what low level physical/mental skills are lacking in you that are keeping you from being all of those things that you know you will need to have in order to achieve your dream.

It could be that you simply struggle to see the ball because of your eyesight. You know you can’t really see the ball, but you don’t want to admit it because then you will have to wear glasses or contacts and you don’t want to. The fact is that if you really want to be a good hitter, you have to see the ball really well. So admit the problem and take the corrective correction to solve it. If your eyesight is holding you back fix it.

One common mental trait that is often hard to admit is the fact that you are afraid. Afraid of the ball. Or afraid of dropping the ball. Or afraid of striking out. Or afraid of being called out. Afraid. Afraid. Afraid.

Your fear causes you to run slower than you really can towards a ball because you don’t want to drop it. It keeps you from swinging for a homerun because you afraid of striking out. It keeps you from trying to steal because you are afraid you will be called out. The best advice we could give you is to start trying to succeed instead of avoiding the negative consequences you associate with doing something wrong. Only you know what fears are truly holding you back from becoming everything you possibly can. But you can’t get “better” until you admit them and begin getting over them.

*“A winner is someone who recognizes his God-given talents, works his tail off to develop them into skills, and uses these skills to accomplish his goals.” – Larry Bird*

If you see well, work hard, practice hitting every single day, are not afraid, yet you still have trouble hitting the ball with much power the skill you are lacking is probably “sound hitting mechanics.” Again the starting point is to admit that you really don’t understand what you are supposed to, or why some girls can “kill the ball” and yet you can’t. Often times that skill is lacking because you have been afraid to ask

questions when a coach has rambled off a bunch of terms you didn't understand. Other times it is simply a matter of you not having the chance to be exposed to sound, positive instruction. That's easy to fix by getting online and finding a hitter instructor, going to a local clinic, or simply asking a really good hitting player on your team for some help.

Some times figuring out what skill you are missing is not as easy as the ones already mentioned. I work with a player who is a phenomenal base runner. Her dream is to set the NCAA career stolen base record. One of her goals based on time is to break the high school stolen base record. She set her high school single season record as a freshman. She came back her sophomore year, doubled her freshman year numbers, and has already shattered her high school's career stolen base record. To increase her speed she lifts weights and has seen a coach to work on her form. She takes speed and agility training about 26 weeks per year. She constantly practices her timing for lead offs, using video equipment to know if her jumps really are good or not. She beats her body sliding and diving. She's faced the fear of being called out. When we talked there was honestly not much else she could do to train herself in order to steal more bases than she already did.

When we discussed each and every at bat, and the results, we came across a common theme ... after her lead off at bat she was generally always on base behind a player from the bottom of her team's lineup who was not comfortable stealing bases. She couldn't steal because the player in front of her never took extra bases because they were afraid to slide, dive and take risks of being called out. We came to realize that the skills she is lacking are "motivation" and "encouragement." In order for her to succeed she is going to have to learn how to take a more vocal role in motivating and encouraging the other players on her team to become better base runners themselves. She will have to take an active role in getting them to learn the skills necessary and help them overcome their fears. If she does that, the others will become more aggressive, giving her the chance to steal more bases. It will also help the team win more games and go deeper into the high school playoffs, which also gives her the opportunity to steal more bases.

The reason that softball is a team sport is that while our dreams may be our own, accomplishing them often requires the help of others. Likewise, accomplishing your personal goals will most certainly also help your team. So as you think through what skills you are lacking don't assume you are on your own ... ask yourself "how can I get some help from my teammates" and "what skills do I need to develop more that will help me and my team."

*"Skill and confidence are an unconquered arm." – George Herbert*

If identifying what skills you need to work on were easy, then you would probably have already done that. What we want to do for the remainder of this chapter is identify some of these low level physical and mental skills, give you some brief information about each. They aren't meant to be used as a checklist. They are simply a starting point to help you start figuring how to break down the key aspects of the game into manageable pieces. Things that you can isolate, focus on and improve in order to accomplish your goal, so that you can achieve your dream. One mental skill that you will see in every section is that of confidence.

con·fi·dence [kon-fi-duhns/ **noun**

- 1.** full trust; belief in the powers, trustworthiness, or reliability of a person or thing: *We have every confidence in their ability to succeed.*
- 2.** belief in oneself and one's powers or abilities; self-confidence; self-reliance; assurance: *His lack of confidence defeated him.*
- 3.** certitude; assurance: *He described the situation with such confidence that the audience believed him completely.*

Many players who lack confidence look with admiration and envy at other players who confidence. They seem to believe that the other players were just born with it. The fact is that like other skills, confidence is learned. You obtain a full trust in your ability to succeed because you've succeeded so many times in practice. You so completely understand your job that it would be hard to imagine yourself not succeeding. If you are lacking confidence, the first step is to be honest about whether you are practicing enough, and have asked enough questions to understand what really needs to be done in order to obtain that confidence. This is such an important topic that we will also cover it more in Chapter 6.

For each skill we are going to help you understand what mastering the skill would look like, and also give you an example of what a typical player would be like who does not have the skill mastered. Some players do better identifying what the positive should look like, while others will do better identifying with what the opposite looks like.

Consider the rest of this chapter a "reference section" that you can come back to as you have time. Find the ones that are most interesting to you and read those. Once you read a few you'll understand how easy it is to break everything in the game down to a set of identifiable skills. Come back to the others when time permits.

## **Hitting**

**Confidence** – The internal belief before a pitch is ever thrown that you will succeed this at bat. A confident batter wants to be the one at the plate with bases loaded and 2 outs at the end of the game. A player who isn't confident is terrified to be the one at the plate in that situation and they start wondering what people will think/say after they fail while they are still on deck.

**Solid mechanics** – If you were to ask 10 batting instructors to demonstrate what they think a "perfect" swing looks like all 10 would likely be different. Because the truth is that each may believe something slightly different about what you are trying to do at bat. Some believe you should be swinging for a home run every swing, while others just want you to swing for a single, while others may just want you to make contact. But all would agree on several basic mechanical things that allows all of the parts in your body to work together in order to transform energy into the ball. You have to see the ball at contact. You have to be balanced when you make contact with the ball. You have to use your entire body not just your arms. Solid mechanics are the things that allow you to be consistent in your results. Not perfect, but consistent. Poor mechanics are the things that the body does that cause you to see your third base coach as you swing and lose sight of the ball. They are the things that cause you to hit the ball on 1 foot and then fall over afterwards. Poor mechanics are what leads to you getting a "lucky hit" one game and then not even making contact the next 6 games.

**Ability to relax** – There are some things in life that require you to do the opposite of what your body wants to do naturally. You want to destroy the ball when you are batting so your body tightens up as you grip the bat with all your strength. Unfortunately while that is the easy thing to do, your body mechanics won't allow you to succeed. The tighter your muscles are the slower you are able to move. You actually need to be relaxed, and your muscles loose so that they can react explosively quick to the ball. There are some mental and some physical principles that players do to stay relaxed at the plate. If you feel your biceps ("guns") while you are holding the bat you aren't relaxed and definitely need work in this area.

**Ability to track the pitch** – Every batter sees the ball when the pitcher first releases it. Those that are really successful at the plate see the ball the entire time that it is traveling to the bat. Part of that comes from sound mechanics that allow the head/eyes to remain still. Another aspect of that is a recognition of your dominant eye and adjusting your mechanics to allow you to accurately see it.

Another key element is the strength of the eye muscles so that they are able to focus on the ball as it is approaching them. If they are honest, those that having tracking the pitch tend to actually completely lose sight of the ball, and that makes it pretty hard to hit.

Ability to recognize the pitch - Over the career of a softball player they are forced to make adjustments as batters. When they start the ball just sits still on a tee. Then coaches lob the ball slowing very straight. Then other players start basically lobbing the ball at them. Soon the pitches get pretty fast, but are still pretty straight. Eventually the absolute hardest thing about batting is that the pitchers purposely throw pitches that move like something from a Dr. Seuss book. Inside, outside, upside downside. Those that are most successful develop the ability to actually recognize the pitch that is coming at them. The computer in their brain not only says "Hey this pitch is coming outside above my waist" it actually relays information like "the spin on the seams is for a curve ball so it is going to be even further outside when it travels the remaining 20 feet to the plate" or "the spin on the seams is for a screw ball so the ball will be a strike by the time it reaches me." If you are thinking to yourself "well duh I've been doing this for the past 2 years" then you are in good shape. But if you are thinking "I can barely tell whether the ball is inside or outside, high or low" then you will most certainly want to get some help to improve on this skill.

Ability to hit the pitch to the right location – Perhaps one of the hardest things to overcome mentally in the game is that of pulling/hitting the ball to the left side of the field. It's developed, and pounded into players when the opposing team is young and doesn't have enough arm strength to throw you out. So no matter how hard/soft you hit the ball you get a "hit" because they can't make the throw to first. Unfortunately those little girls grow into big girls and develop cannons for arms. But somehow most batters never get over those formidable days when they tried to hit everything to that side, and seem to be happy getting thrown out every time that they do. A huge aspect of being successful at the plate is the understanding both mentally and physically that you just don't swing at every pitch, you have to swing to hit each pitch to the location that will provide you the most success for that pitch. High inside pitches should be crushed down the left field line. But high outside pitches should be crushed down the right field line instead. Really successful hitters know where to hit each pitch and use the entire field of play based on what the pitcher throws to them. Those that don't understand this principle just swing the bat the exact same way on every pitch.

Knowledge of situational hitting – Not sure if you have ever thought about this before but when you walk up to the plate you stand in the batters box, not the hitters box. If the purpose of the game was for you to get a hit every single time they would have named it differently. Your goal. The purpose of you having a bat in your hands is to have a good at bat based on the situation you are in right then. For instance if the bases are clear and there are no outs, and you have no balls or strikes you should feel free to look for "your pitch." You know the one where the bells and whistles go off in your head because you know you are going to crush it. If your pitch is high and inside, then wait for it, why swing at the low outside pitch you generally hit a ground ball with to the second basemen. But what if that isn't the situation. What if you are standing in the box and the fastest girl on your team is at third base, and the pitcher throws that low outside pitch. Isn't that the perfect situation for you to hit a ground ball to the second basemen so that your teammate will score the winning run even though you will be out? Those that understand that every pitch, every at bat is different than the one before are usually very successful and have a high batting average as well as a very high number of RBI's. If you go to the plate to step into the hitters box, and you are only thinking about how you can be safe each at bat you need some help understanding and improving on this skill. If you go to the plate and believe there is a strike zone that you have to swing at every strike and not swing for any that are balls you need some help understanding and improving on this skill.

## Slapping

**Confidence** - A confident slapper is equally happy regardless if the defense is back and they will drag bunt and when the defense is up and they can power slap regardless what pitch the pitcher may throw. A slapper lacking confidence hopes the defense stays where they were for the last player because they have a predefined idea before they get into the box of what they want to do. They start to panic before the pitch is thrown if the defense moves and is going to stop what they planned to do.

**Solid mechanics** – As with normal batting slapping instructors will vary on what they think the perfect mechanics are. But all will agree that the objective is to be in a well balanced position at contact, that allows you to run the shortest possible distance to first, and that your primary objective is to put the ball on the ground so that you can get into a foot race because you will win. Poor mechanics cause you to be called out frequently for being out of the batters box, or never make contact with outside pitches because you “pull out” too quickly, or cause you to make very weak contact with the ball.

**Ability to relax** – See hitting

**Ability to track the pitch** – See hitting

**Ability to recognize the pitch** – See hitting

**Ability to hit the pitch to the right location** – See hitting

**Knowledge of situational hitting** – See hitting; Just because you are a slapper doesn't mean that the fundamental rules of softball don't apply to you. In addition to hitting in general you also have to be aware of the field conditions and how that will impact the ball once it hits the ground.

**Ability to read the defense** - Not sure who the person was who first tried to slap. Guess they thought “wow this standing here and hitting is way too easy, I think I'd like to try and be moving to really make it hard to time the ball and make contact, and add the complexity of trying to place the ball in a certain location at a varying speed.” Then when that became too easy they thought “Hmm maybe I'll try to adjust my thoughts to how to put the ball in play while the defense is moving as the pitch is on the way.” Almost seems insane to expect players to be able to do all that, but that is exactly what great slappers have to do. As that drop ball on the outside corner of the plate is on the way, and you are exploding through the box you also have to be able to react and adjust to how the defense is moving. “Is the third baseman crashing or just tip-toeing so I can still lay it down soft?” “Is the second baseman cheating to cover first while the first baseman is crashing should I slap to the hole she is leaving?” If you step into the box knowing what you will do and you don't adjust once you see while the defense is adjusting you need to work on this skill.

## Pitching

**Confidence** –The desire to have the ball in your hand, with all eyes watching you and assume the responsibility of winning or losing. The internal belief that you will win the battle for air space that is about to occur at the plate. The faith that you can throw your best stuff to anyone and they will be out. Finally that you can recognize the weakness that hitters have and adjust what you pitch to take advantage of those weaknesses.

**Core strength** – Your “core” consists of far more than just your abs. Instead of focusing on a 6 pack, start thinking about a 36 pack. Because that's how many muscles comprise your “core.” Your core muscles help stabilize your spine and your pelvis. They provide your ability to move more efficiently, improve your balance and actually increase the power from your shoulders, arms and legs as well. Almost sounds like you would be crazy not to focus on building your “core” if you were a pitcher. If you have a lot of back pain after you pitch, this is an area that you should start



focusing on immediately.

Fast twitch fiber training – No not fiber like in Oatmeal. Your body has to two types of muscle fibers. Slow twitch and fast twitch. Really easy to remember if you think of slow pitch and fast pitch. Your slow twitch muscle fibers provide a longer lasting energy source for duration which are perfect for athletes like marathon runners. While your fast twitch muscle fibers provide much shorter, but more rapid bursts of strength or speed for you. But those bursts cause fatigue sooner. Kind of perfect for pitchers when you think about it. You stand on the mound just looking pretty for about 20 seconds every pitch. You do a simple little present and arm stretch for about 1 second. But then you absolutely explode for less than .5 second. If you are as strong at the end of the day as you are at the beginning of the day, you probably have a lot of these fast twitch fibers and are already doing a lot to keep them trained. If you are a phenomenal pitcher for about 3 innings per day and then you “run out of gas” it’s because you need to focus on training these key fast twitch muscle fibers. But the good news is that they can be trained.

Explosiveness – Explosiveness is a term frequently used but infrequently defined. In simple terms it could be defined as producing a great amount of power in a short amount of time. Essentially pitching is all about looking pretty for 99.9% of the time you are on the mound, but getting your body to deliver a ball at a very high rate of speed in a split second. It allows for no spare time to think and no spare time to aim. If you aren’t practicing enough to allow for an “explosion” then you need to put more effort into your practice so that you don’t have to think and you don’t have to aim. You quite simply need to develop yourself so that while on the mound you can simply explode.

Leg Drive – One of the most common mistakes pitchers make at any age is relying on their arm strength alone to throw the ball. Physics tells us that for every action there is an equal but opposite reaction. Leg drive involves pushing hard and explosively against the pitching rubber so that it will explosively propel your body forward. If you are just using the pitching rubber as a place to start your pitch and are relying on your arms alone you are not reaching your potential. Understand that your leg muscles are much larger than your arms and are more than willing to help you if you allow them to.

Solid mechanics – Of all the positions on the field mechanics solid mechanics are probably most important to pitchers. Not only in order to succeed but more importantly to stay healthy. A batter can have really bad mechanics and still play ball for years. A pitcher with bad mechanics can seriously injure her self and end her career early. If you have no consistency with your pitches, or feel abnormally sore for long periods of time after you pitch you should be sure to find an instructor who can help you.

### **Fielding:**

Confidence – The internal desire to want the batter to hit the ball to you because you know you will do the right thing with the ball. A fielder lacking confidence is apprehensive and hopes the ball goes to someone else when the game is on the line.

Explosive agility – The ability of your feet to immediately be able to respond to the signals your brain sends out and make the movements that are needed based on the ball, oncoming runners, other players and even umpires. Players lacking in agility can see obstacles in their path but have problems avoiding them in time to avoid them.

Solid mechanics – Players choose to put themselves into position to make outs by practicing and perfecting the mechanical elements of fielding the ball, transitioning it to their throwing hand and releasing the ball. The mechanics they have internalized enable them to appear to flow through the

ball without pause. Fielders who have not developed solid fielding mechanics appear to stop and go almost robotically on plays as they think through the “right” thing to do next.

**Ability to relax** – The ability to find a focal point on the field and tune out all of the screaming parents and opposing players while thinking through what to do in each situation if the ball is hit to you and others. Players who have trouble relaxing often find themselves forgetting how many outs there or, and not remembering where the base runners may be.

**Ability to forget errors** – The understanding of a player that despite how hard they work in practice that if they do something often enough that anything can and will happen with the ball at some point in time during a game. Solid fielders are able to accept those odds and release the last play in favor of focusing on the next play. Players who are unable to forget errors tend to focus more on what they fear others are thinking of them and lose track of what to do next in the game.

## **Throwing:**

**Confidence** - The internal knowledge that when the ball leaves your hand it will result in the batter/runner being out. Whether via a direct throw by you or by a great throw to your cutoff.

**Making the right throw** – A great throw to the wrong player can be as bad as a terrible throw to the right player. Part of becoming a great “thrower” is thinking through each play before it happens. Analyze where the base runners are now, their speed, the number of outs and a variety of other key things before the batter ever makes contact. There are occasions where you need to listen to your teammates before releasing the ball, but if you know have a tendency to do your thinking after the ball is in your glove then you have a lot of work to do on this skill.

**Solid mechanics** – As with pitching solid throwing mechanics are important not just for an accurate throw but for your safety as well. You need to seek help with mechanics if your elbow/shoulder consistently ends up hurting after playing a lot or if you still cross your fingers hoping the ball goes where you want it to when you release it.

## **Base Running:**

**Ability to read the defense** –Great base running starts with your ability to read the defense and make decisions on your own to push it to the next base. If you are the kind of player who goes base to base waiting for hits and coaches to yell “GO” you are leaving extra bases behind and you have some work to do.

**Explosive reactions** – Aggressive base runners are always looking for the slight bobbles, the throw that is leading the infielder a few feet from the bag, the pitcher that is receiving the ball and not looking at them and they can react explosively to those little things and take the extra bases that others leave laying around. If you are fundamentally running bases afraid to make outs you have some work to do, because games are won by those that react to those tiny little mistakes, mental lapses by the other team.

**Ability to recognize pitches and where they are going** – Anyone can take advantage of a free gift by the opposing catcher when there is a wild pitch or a passed ball. However, many bases can be stolen by taking advantage of really good pitches. For instance I’ve never met a great base runner who doesn’t love a pitcher who throws great changeups. Once you transition to a base runner you need to recognize the awesome fact that it’s hard for the catcher to throw you out on a ball that is floating in that she hasn’t caught. If you know that a pitcher/catcher can throw you out by 6 inches normally, then take advantage of the drop ball that forces the catchers to drop/block. The inside pitch that

forces the catcher to have to avoid the batter etc. If you are only stealing bases when the coach tells you to before the pitch is ever thrown you have some work to do if you want to become a great base runner.

**Knowledge of your speed** – At the root of base stealing is the ability to leave one base and get to the next in less time than it takes the pitcher to release the ball, the ball to travel to the catcher, the catcher to catch the ball, transition the ball to a throwing motion, throw the ball to a fielder at the base, the fielder to catch the ball and then apply the tag. Yet if I were to ask you your time from first to second you probably couldn't tell me. A key aspect of becoming a great base runner is having your time measured so you know it, and then measuring the time of the pitcher/catcher/fielder. If your time is less than theirs then you have nothing to fear. If you know the times are close, then get really good at recognizing the pitches and understand what each will do to the overall time. It all comes down to time. If you don't know yours yet, then you need to figure it out quickly.

**Timing for leadoffs** – I see players/teams put so much effort into so many things that has such little impact in typical games. At high levels of the game there are so few run downs, so few double plays ever turned but so much time spent on them. Yet for something like a lead off which happens on every pitch when a runner is on base I see so little effort put into practicing it. Every base runner thinks they have good timing for leads but it's hard to argue with a video. If you haven't been video taped from an angle that will show when your foot leaves the base in relation to the ball coming out of the pitchers hand you really don't know whether your timing is accurate or not. You may be confusing your initial movement with actually leaving the base. Your goal as a great base runner should be to have your trailing foot off the base as the ball leaves the pitchers hand, if not before.

## **Catching:**

**Own the air space** – Essentially the job of a catcher is simple ... define and own the air space for your pitcher and the umpire that provides your team with the best chance of winning. You have to identify the invisible rectangle that the umpire wants your pitcher to bring the ball into and then encourage him to expand it. If you are just putting your glove up in the air and hoping the pitcher does all of the work you have a lot of work to do in terms of developing as a catcher.

**Framing** – A great pitch is like a great work of art and deserves a great frame. In catching framing involves convincing the umpire that the pitch they just saw was in fact a strike. If you don't understand yet that way your glove is positioned is as important as the pitch itself then you need to focus on this aspect of your game.

**Blocking** – Correctly blocking a wild pitch doesn't just involve getting it to bounce off of you it involves getting your body in a position that it will bounce off of you and go forward, and in a position that then gives you the best opportunity to retrieve the ball and still keep runners from advancing. If you have good reflexes and are dropping but the ball is playing off of you in random areas of the field you need to work hard at this aspect of the game.

**Pitch calling** – Good catchers can relay information about how the pitcher is doing to the coaching staff who is calling the pitches so they call the pitches that provide the pitcher the best chance for success. Great catchers not only follow what is working for their pitcher, but also identify weaknesses in hitters or figure out what they are looking to hit and have the confidence to call the right pitch in each situation rather than relying on coaches who aren't as involved in the action. Amazing catchers do such a great job that they instill a level of trust into their pitchers that allows them to just relax and throw the pitch as it's called. If you aren't comfortable enough with your understanding of not only your pitcher, but the batters and the unique situation on every pitch you have some work to do

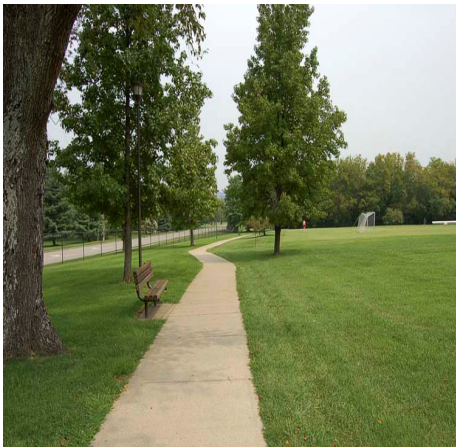
in this area. You alone have the best seat in the house to control the game and you need to own that responsibility.

## 6

### Get Started and Keep Moving Forward

*"It doesn't matter how many say it cannot be done or how many people have tried it before; it's important to realize that whatever you're doing, it's your first attempt at it." -*  
--Wally Amos

Now that you know where you want to go, and you've identified the skills it will take to get you there the question is "What is it that you are willing to do to improve on and achieve those skills?"



To help you understand the process of improving on the skills you have identified we are going to continuously refer to mountain climbing. You are probably thinking "what in the world does mountain climbing have to do with improving my ability to recognize a pitch?" That's a fair question. The relationship is that your pursuit of any skill is a journey. One in which there are going to be times where there are areas of flat walks or slight inclines. Times at which you are fine walking along by yourself.

While easy going you don't get to the top of mountains by walking along flat trails. In order to get to the top you have to incur some inclines or times where you may or may not make it without some help.



Then there are other times where in your pursuit you will reach a plateau. A make or break time. A point at which you either retreat or you have to figure out how to overcome a seemingly impossible obstacle and there is no way you can do it without help.

As you look at each skill you may find that you are at different locations of the journey. You may feel that for some you are at the beginning of the journey and have a long walk ahead that you can pursue by yourself. Others you may feel like you are already near the top facing the steep climb and you must have some help.

## **Confidence**

For the sake of this book we will assume you have absolutely no confidence. You wouldn't want to be the one in the batters box with 2 outs, bases loaded in the 7'th inning. You wouldn't want to be the one who has to throw that pitch. And you wouldn't want to have the ball hit to you. The good news is that confidence is a skill that you can do a lot of work on all by yourself.

If you Google the term "Quotes on Confidence" you will be hit with millions of results. Just reading a few of them per day will help you to some degree because they will start sticking in your head and helping you begin the process of thinking differently.

You won't conquer confidence by just reading though. Your next step might be to identify, write down and start repeating, maybe even memorizing your favorites. The ones that really impact your brain and make you feel differently. They will help you start "faking it until you make it."

If you Google the term "help with confidence" instead of a list of things to just read, you will instead have the opportunity to read and take action on improving your confidence through various exercises and drills. You can think of these activities as still being a flat walk that you can do by yourself, but there are no shady trees. You will actually have to start practicing the thought processes and "break a sweat" mentally.

## **Self talk**

One thing that you will eventually have to work on to improve your confidence is your self talk. You know the conversations you have in your head with yourself. "I can't do this" has to become "I've got this." Improving this is easier if you do two things.

1. Ask someone to start planting those seeds in your head and then tell them what you really said to yourself afterwards. Someone in your dugout whom you trust and is a positive person who can continually repeat to you "You've got this" "I've got faith in you" "Nobody better kid." After you bat, pitch, field go to them and say "Thanks. But honestly as soon as you said it, I immediately started thinking she is such a liar, you don't have this, you are scared silly." Or "thanks for keeping this up. This at bat I finally thought maybe she's right."
2. More importantly you need to start practicing, practicing and practicing the skill you lack the confidence in. It's a lot easier to start telling yourselves the right things if you have hit 800 line drives during the week.

So now you have strolled along for awhile by yourself, you started asking for help and things are going great. Now it's going to be easy peasy right? Unfortunately there are some things in life that refuse to change just because you are trying to.

The same negative influences you may have had gnawing at you are still gnawing at you. The same obstacles that were there yesterday are still obstacles today. They may be your parents "I can't believe you struck out again." It might be your coach rolling his eyes and shaking his head and turning away from you after an error. It might be horrendous comments from teammates after you've dropped the ball in the

outfield. Those things aren't going to go away just because you are now trying your hardest to improve your confidence. Those things may seem like the straight up inclines and you absolutely need help with. There is help out there for you. But you may need to do more research than just Googling, you may need to buy some books and you may even need to reach out to a sports psychologist. Suggestions include:

Living the Dream by Dr. Dot Richardson	<a href="http://www.amazon.com/Living-Dream-Dot-Richardson/dp/1575662035">http://www.amazon.com/Living-Dream-Dot-Richardson/dp/1575662035</a>
Mind Gym by Gary Mack and David Casstevens	<a href="http://www.amazon.com/Mind-Gym-Athletes-Guide-Excellence/dp/0071395970">http://www.amazon.com/Mind-Gym-Athletes-Guide-Excellence/dp/0071395970</a>
The Mental Game of Baseball by H.A. Dorfman	<a href="http://www.amazon.com/Mental-Game-Baseball-Guide-Performance/dp/1888698543">http://www.amazon.com/Mental-Game-Baseball-Guide-Performance/dp/1888698543</a>

The fact that the climb is straight up and you need help doesn't mean that it will remain straight up forever. It could be that after getting help and overcoming that obstacle you find yourself on another flat trail where you just need to do the work by yourself again.

"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start now and make a brand new ending." ---*Carl Bard*

## Obstacles

Regardless of what the skills are that you need to work on, and what level you are at now you are going to face obstacles on your easy-peasy stroll along the way to achieving your goals that help you accomplish your dream. How big you allow the obstacles to be will determine your success or failure.

Let's pretend you are absolutely horrible at hitting. Other players that you know used to be horrible batting and they got help along their journey of improving by spending \$3,000 on batting lessons over 2 years. Your family has \$0 extra dollars so you have a choice to make. Is the lack of money such a sharp incline in your mind that you just give up, or do you look for alternatives?

For starters let's imagine you have absolutely no way to improve without the lessons. Can you get part time job or raise money by baby sitting to pay for the lessons without expecting mom/dad to pay? Uh-oh let's make it tougher so pretend that you can't. There are no young children in your area and absolutely nobody will give a job to a hard working, disciplined softball player.

The time comes to go back to school would you be willing to tell mom that you will wear the same clothes and shoes, and carry the same backpack again this school year. Would you be willing to do that? Obstacles may cause you to make sacrifices in some other area of your life. Those that make sacrifices often do much better than others who take the opportunity for granted.

Now let's back off the requirement that you have to pay for the lessons. There are plenty of other options if you want to be creative. Do you have enough money to purchase a hitting DVD/Video online that you can use to help you practice? Are you too proud to just ask your friends on the team to try and teach you some of the mechanical things that their instructor has asked them to practice or is that an option for you? Do you have a camera/phone that you can just video your swing, video a friend's swing and then watch them to try and compare and see what they do differently? Can you upload your video to an online site where people offer to help for free like [www.DiscussFastpitch.com](http://www.DiscussFastpitch.com)? Can you just go search on YouTube for hitting advice?

*"If you don't go after what you want, you'll never have it. If you don't ask, the answer is always no. If you don't step forward, you're always in the same place." -- Nora Roberts*

Suddenly you may start realizing that on your journey to achieve a skill you don't have to go along the same path that another person may have taken. We just get lazy as humans and make assumptions that since they did it one way it has to be done that way.

### **You will more than like work on multiple skills at one time**

Don't be overwhelmed if you came up with a list of 1,949 of skills that you feel like need to work on. Many of them actually complement each other in ways you may not see just yet. Ways that allow you to accomplish many at the same time.

For instance imagine that you need to work on your confidence, You need to learn to hit better, you need to work on your communication skills, you need to learn how accept advice better and you need how to shake things off. If you post your video online in a discussion forum, not every response is going to help you. There are going to be posts that are negative "That's the worse swing I've ever seen you should switch to soccer." In your head you should say "thank you", laugh it off and move on to the next comment. That's exactly the kind of thing that is going to help you with your desire to learn to shake things off and learn. You get better without it being in a game situation.

Other comments are going to ask you to do things like "stand on your head and tie your hands behind your back." You know that they probably aren't going to help but since you are trying to learn how to accept advice better, put a smile on your face, go grab a pillow and see if standing on your head with your hands tied behind your back makes you a better hitter. One of those crazy drills just might help you even though it didn't sound like it would. Suddenly the light will go on in your head and from now on at practice you will start accepting input from coaches and at least try what they are suggesting instead of rolling your eyes.

Some of the comments are going to make completely no sense to you in exactly the same way that some of the things your parents or coaches say things that seem to make sense to them, but you don't completely understand. Instead of ignoring those posts and moving to the next one work on your communication skills and write back "I understand A, B and C but I'm not sure what you mean by "blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." I haven't heard those terms before and I can't find them in Google." The more questions you ask and the more you work on communicating the more you will know. The more you will know the more confident you will feel. The more confident you feel that you understand the purpose of the drill the harder you will practice the drill. The more effort you put into practice the better you get.

Once you find the person/people that you trust and are learning the most from keep going back for more and keep putting the effort in to earn their time.

*"Optimism is a cheerful frame of mind that enables a tea kettle to sing though it's in hot water up to its nose." ---Unknown*

The great thing about any sport is that so many of the skills you need to reach your dreams are also skills that are going to help you in other areas of your life. So instead of backing off of them because you are "afraid" push through and improve them because you're improving much more than just your softball game.



The important things to remember on your journey to improve each skill are:

- It won't always be easy. But likewise it won't always be hard. There are peaks, valleys and deserts that everyone has to face.
- You will need help at appropriate times, and you may have to be creative in figuring out how to get it. But you also need to take ownership of your game and do lots of work on your own in order to improve.
- It doesn't matter where you are in the journey, or how long you think it will take to get there, the important thing is always, always, always that you just keep moving forward. Keep getting better.

As you begin the hard work of improving yourself physically and mentally never, ever, forget the image of yourself having achieved your dream.





## 7

### Rest Stops

It may seem a little unusual to write a motivational book designed to get you to identify your dream and pursue it relentlessly and then end it with a chapter on taking breaks.

If your dream was to walk to the mail box you could probably make it there and back really quickly without any training or planning. But if your dream is like that of walking across the country you will most certainly need to plan times to rest or you will never survive the journey.

As you pursue your dream in this great game understand that there are going to be times when you feel like you are absolutely “on fire” you breathe, sweat and eat the game morning, noon and night. You will love every second of conditioning. Enjoy every second of practice. And of course be exhilarated by every second of the games. If you condition, practice and play every single day of the year those flames will undoubtedly go out. Conditioning will become intolerable. Practice becomes difficult. And you may not even enjoy the games.

That’s only natural. Neither your body nor your mind can run on high intensity every single day of the year. Instead of showing how much you “love the game” by picking up with teams when your team takes a break do something crazy like “taking the break” yourself. Actually be a teenage girl one weekend and just go to the mall and hangout with your friends. Mani and Pedi weekend. Have a slumber party. Whatever it is that allows you to mentally and physically step back from the intensity. Taking a rest is a vital part of the overall process and is not in any way the same thing as giving up.

Physically the intensity of training and games puts a lot of stress on your body. Taking planned time off is a way to allow the muscles, tendons and ligaments to heal. It replenishes the energy your body stores up. It allows your body to cleanse itself from the chemicals that build up through repeated activity.

Quite simply there are limits to how much your body can handle before it physically breaks down. Resting now and then doesn’t mean you don’t love the game, it means that you want to continue playing at a high level of intensity longer. It allows you to have the best chance of avoiding getting “burned out.”

Everyone knows if you try to walk across the entire country you would need to stop to sleep, to eat and to drink. Yet so many girls are unwilling to do the same thing to sustain an 18 year long softball career. As you begin the great journey of pursuing your fairy tale ending, your life long dream of softball understand that the easiest way to ensure that your body doesn’t let you down is to plan some purposeful rest stops and to listen to your body if you need extra ones.

#### **Timed breaks for evaluation**

In Chapter 4 we introduced the concept of S.M.A.R.T. Goals and assigned the term “Time Based” to represent the T. In Chapter 5 we asked you to identify the physical and mental skills that you think you most need to focus on as part of achieving your goals. For the remainder of this chapter we want to continue the development of those concepts and tie them together since we are dealing with time.

Regardless of the skills you need to work on, an important aspect of your progress will be measuring your improvement on a regularly basis. Not a daily basis because that would drive you crazy. We suggest the following time patterns:

1 Week  
6 Weeks  
3 Months  
6 Months  
1 Year

Before we give some practical examples of how to utilize those time lines for a few example skills we want to ensure that you understand why we chose the times we have.

If you recall from Chapter 4 we feel that getting started immediately is critical. In the fast paced, busy world we live in 1 week is essentially the same as “immediate.” It provides enough time to do the “real world stuff” you already have in front of you, without allowing you too much time to lose track of the fact that you are trying to lay the foundation that ensures you reach your dream.

It takes 3 weeks to break a habit. It takes an additional 3 weeks to build a new habit. So we feel that it only makes sense to take the next measurement after 6 weeks to determine if you have made a new habit and are beginning to see the results.

A typical travel ball season lasts about 6 months. Our 3 month recommendation is essentially mid season. Understand that as you begin really focusing on your skill development and making changes you will have positive weekends and you will also encounter some obstacles. 3 months is an adequate amount of time to really see if there are patterns developing from your work. Not how you performed your last at bat, but what is your average. Not how you threw your last pitch, but what is your ERA.

Seasons end with team parties and a celebration of the memories of the trophies/medals/ribbons you accumulated throughout the season. Those are fun times. But when the balloons are popped that end of season marks a great time period (6 months) to evaluate and measure your progress on each and every skill.

Our last suggestion is that you set aside time each and every year to evaluate your progress. That will most likely include 1 or 2 travel seasons and a high school season. Which means you will see lots of different pitchers. Lots of different batters. Encountered perhaps 3 different coaches and coaching styles. Perhaps 3 sets of teammates.

## Adjustment

The purpose of intentionally planning time to measure your progress is two fold: It allows you to see that your hard work is paying off so you know you are on your way to your dream. Knowing your are going in the right direction is a powerful motivator to keep working hard and facing the challenges that are between you and your dream. You may not see Prince Charming yet, but you can hear the horse at a distance.

Perhaps more importantly, measuring your progress allows you to recognize when you are not on track and allows you to make adjustments before you fail completely.

*“When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don’t adjust the goals, adjust the action steps” Confucious*

Adjusting may mean getting some more help instead of continuing to do what you’ve been doing on your own. It may mean doubling down on the amount of practice you are putting into the skill. Other times it may mean completely abandoning what you are doing and trying something completely different.

## Putting it all together

Throughout this book we've introduced you to a lot of concepts and tried our best to give you the tools you need to succeed. We wanted to end the book with some detailed examples of how to tie it all together for a fictitious player we will name Ashley.

Ashley is 13 years old and has been playing softball now for 4 years. Her dream has always been to play to play college softball. After working through Chapter 2 and thinking a lot she specifically wants to write her dream down "I want to be a starting player in college by my sophomore year." Like many players she starts with a goal of wanting to be a better hitter. As she works through chapters 3 and 4 she modifies that to be "I want to hit at least .375 within 1 year." She arrived at that goal because that is what she feels it will take to be able to earn a spot on her high school team next year.

As she goes through Chapter 5 she realizes that in order to achieve that goal she specifically needs to improve on her confidence, and the ability to recognize and go with the pitch that is delivered to her.

She begins using Google to find as much information as she can online about both. She realizes that there is a lot of material available that she can use to help her build her confidence. She chooses to immediately write down a few of her favorite quotes and starts memorizing them. She also purchases a small notebook and places it in her bat bag so that she can start journaling immediately after her ball games.

While she finds a lot of articles about "going with the pitch" they are very technical and even though she understands the basic idea she doesn't really understand how to apply it and do it physically, so she decides she needs some help. She speaks to her parents about needing help but they tell her there is no money in the family budget for her to get batting lessons. While disappointed she evaluates her alternatives. She asks her coach and he simply tells her the same things that she's read online.

She has many good hitters on her team, but she recalls that one of them does a really good job of hitting not only to left field, but to left center, right center and right field. She talks to her teammate and explains what she is trying to do and asks her if she would be willing to help her. Her teammate tells her that she had the same problem last year, but then her dad went to a clinic and after he came home he started having her set the batting tee up in different spots for practice instead of always hitting the ball in the same spot. Then she invites her over to her house and demonstrates so that Ashley can see exactly what she means.

Over the course of the next 6 weeks Ashley keeps memorizing her favorite quotes, and writes down the situations in her notebook after games that made her feel confident and the things that made her feel less confident. She practices her batting off the tee the way her teammate showed her at least 1 time per week.

After 6 weeks (the time she chose to review how she is doing) she realizes that while she is more confident on most occasions she still gets really nervous when she is up with 2 outs. She decides that what she's been doing has helped her, but that it still isn't helping with 2 out situations. So she finds some professional softball players through Facebook and sends them a message asking them what they do to help them feel more confident when they are up with 2 outs. Their answers are all different, but she decides that she will try one at a time and see if any of them help her. As she writes them down in her notebook so that she doesn't forget them, she already starts gaining confidence just knowing that these professional players do what she is writing and knows it works for them.

She is pretty upset that even after 6 weeks she still tries to pull just about every pitch, and strikes out swinging at outside pitches. She tells her teammate that it just isn't working for her and that she's not going to keep "wasting her time practicing" on Wednesdays. Her friend lovingly laughs realizing that

she's only been practicing 1 day per week and suggests that the problem isn't the practice she's doing it's the practice she isn't doing that's the problem. She tells her that she practices at least 4 times per week and that when they have big tournaments she practices every day so that she'll be confident when she steps to the plate. Then a light goes on for Ashley realizing that you can study and think about being confident but that she should also practice to increase her confidence. They agree that from now on Ashley should text her after she's finished her batting practice so that she's accountable and will stick with it.

Ashley smiles as she wakes up, looks at her calendar and realizes that today is the day she marked down 3 long months ago. It's the day she gets to spend time reviewing her journal and analyzing her improvement. The smile is because she knows she has a lot to pat herself on the back for. She emailed her coach during the week and asked to see her batting average. His reply was just what she expected it would be. It showed her average had come up from .245 last season to .303 for this season. The email was concluded with a "keep it up kid" kind of remark. Under her breath while reading his email she mumbled to herself "I will coach." As she reads her journal, and reflects on her progress she believes that she'll continue improving if she just keeps doing what she is now.

In the last game of the season Ashley comes to bat with 2 outs and runners on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. The solid line drive to right field she hits was positive, but she's even more excited that she stepped into the box knowing that she was going to do it. She is on cloud 9 until she gets her coaches email later that week with her batting average for the season .315. She was so sure that she it would be higher than that. After working for 3 months she had improved almost 60 points from her average last year, but now she had only improved 12 points the next 3 months.

She sulked for 2-3 days then decided to write to the coach because he must have done something wrong but she wasn't sure how to say that without getting him upset. Finally she did write and just leveled with the coach about how hard she'd been working and didn't understand how come her average only improved 12 points since the last time she had checked. His response was pretty much like "You silly girl .315 is your average for the entire season, not just the last 3 months. If you wanted just the last 3 months you should have said that. For just the last 3 months your average is .337. More importantly though your average for the last month when we played our most important tournaments was .345."

The following day she got a call from another team who needed a player to pick up with them for a few tournaments. She knew that the coming month and a half was the only down time she would have before her team started practicing for their fall tournaments and that she would also have to cancel the baby sitting and dog sitting jobs she had lined up to help her raise money to see a batting coach. So while she was extremely flattered by the offer she had to decline it so that she could make some money and let her body regain some strength.

During the coming weeks she worked a lot of hours baby sitting and dog sitting while her friends got to hang out at the mall. She missed the fun but she knew what the money would mean. During those weeks she also made lots of calls to different batting coaches in the area. She would only have enough money for 10 lessons and she wanted to be sure that she was going to see the right person. She was specific and honest about what pitchers and types of pitches she still had problems facing. She was clear what she wanted to learn and wanted to find the batting instructor that was willing to focus on those things.

It took a lot of sacrifice to make the money, but she proudly passed it across the counter to sign up for a package of 10 sessions. Her first night went horribly. The instructor had set a tee up that was really, really high compared to what she was used to. All night she struggled and hit the tee more often than the ball. When she returned the following week she sighed out loud when the instructor set the same ridiculously high batting tee up. They asked her what was the matter and she exclaimed "It's too stinking high. How

am I supposed to hit the ball like that.” The instructor said “You told me on the phone that you really struggled to hit rise ball pitchers and that is what you wanted me to teach you to do, but you didn’t want me to change the rest of your swing. You aren’t going to hit the ball if you keep dropping your hands when you start your swing. If you are willing to let me show you how to start your swing slightly differently then this tee won’t be a problem for you.” The next few sessions were tough as she struggled to adjust what she had been doing for several years. But by the last session Ashley had established a new habit. With her birthday rapidly approaching she asked her parents for a high batting tees. Until it arrived she made use of an old bucket to put her existing tee on top of so she could continue practice.

She was ecstatic after her team’s first practice when the coach handed them a schedule of games for a friendly they were going to play in the following weekend. Her friend asked “Why are you so excited, I hate facing that first team. They throw those stinking rise balls.” Ashley said “Exactly. I’ve been working on them for the last several months and I’m going to own that team from now on.” They both stayed late as Ashley relayed what she had learned and how she had been practicing.

Ashley walked to bat with tons of confidence, only to have it shattered as she popped up on her first at bat. Her second at bat. And her last at bat. She simply wrote in her journal after the game “I was sure I’d kill the ball, instead I just popped everything up not sure why I practiced so hard.” She realized that what she wrote was both good and bad. Her confidence had obviously grown, but perhaps her talent didn’t match her confidence now. Two weeks later she was stunned when her coach told her that she was moving up in the lineup to face the same pitcher. She said “Why coach? I practiced more than ever to be able to hit her, but all I did was popup.” The coach said “practicing is a lot different than seeing live pitching. Do you realize that last season all you did against rise ball pitchers was strike out? She is the best we’ve ever faced and she didn’t get a single pitch past you, but she had 12 strikeouts against our team. I need you to at least demonstrate for the team that they can at least make contact against her.”

Since this is just a hypothetical story it would be easy for us to just write “Ashley’s fairy godmother floated in behind the concession stand and gave her a magical bat. She went into the next game and had 2 monster 500 foot home runs off the rise ball pitcher and become the best hitter in the country.” That would be a great ending if chapter 1 had started “Once upon a time in a far off land...”

The point of this hypothetical situation wasn’t to just be a great good night fairy tale. We wrote this to help you see how you need to identify goals that get you to your dream. Help you figure out what skills it takes to achieve the goals and go about the very difficult work of improving them. Help you understand some of the things that can happen in the course of working on those skills and face the reality that just when you think you may have learned all that you can, there is going to be something that challenges you to either continue to pursue your dream or just give up.

You’ve already done what your competition hasn’t ... you’ve identified your fairy tale ending? The one that you are willing to pursue relentlessly. The one you will not give up on.

You now have the picture that will stick in your head that will make all of the extra conditioning, the blisters, the soreness, the late hours, the “frogs” you may have in your life all pale in comparison as you reach for it.

YOUR DREAM.  
YOUR GOALS.  
YOUR WORK.  
YOUR SUCCESS.