

## So You Want To Be A Big-Time Player?

*The following is an excerpt of an article by Sasho Cirovski, the Head Coach of University of Maryland. It is aimed at the elite level athlete.*

The MLS had a great year. Women's pro soccer is set to begin next April. College soccer is better than ever. Our youth national teams are busier and more competitive than ever. Soccer-specific stadiums are being built around the country. Clubs are getting more organized. Sponsors are buying into soccer. There has never been a better time to be a youngster aspiring to have a career in soccer in the USA.

So then, what does it take to make it! Well, there is no easy answer to that question. However there are some basic truths.

First and foremost, you must be blessed with a certain level of physical ability. Improving your fitness, speed, strength, flexibility, agility, balance, vertical, etc., can all be improved incrementally but unless you have a minimum capacity to perform at your aspired level, then you will struggle.

Second and most importantly, you must fall in love! That's right ... fall in love with the ball, fall in love with yourself (don't confuse this with arrogance or selfishness), and finally, fall in love with this beautiful game. Now, what exactly do I mean by that? Well, I've had the privilege of coaching some of the best young players our country has produced over the past 10 years. I've also had a chance to observe and follow the careers of many of the best soccer players all over the world. For sure, I've read biographies and autobiographies of many of the great athletes as they achieved their greatness. In all of these success stories, there are many similarities. The best way for me to summarize what they did to succeed and what you can do to give yourself a better chance of succeeding is to live like a champion.

Below is the **C-H-A-M-P-I-O-N** acronym that I've developed for athletes who care enough and are prepared to work to achieve greatness.

**Commitment:** Decide if being a great player is important to you. If the answer is yes, don't wait for an environment to be created for you. Don't wait for a coach to make you great. If you are not going out on your own and working on your individual techniques daily -- for at least an hour a day (especially on those days when you are not playing or practicing with a team) -- then you don't have the heart to be a champion!

Remember, soccer is a very easy game to play, but it's an extremely difficult one to play well! In that sense it's a little bit like golf. Do you think Tiger Woods spends at least an hour a day on his technique? I can tell you that Marco Etcheverry does!

**Humility:** It's what you learn after you "know it all" that really counts. The great ones all possess this quality that inspires them to get better because they all have the greatest amount of respect for the challenges issued to them daily by the opponents and the special demands of the sport. They are courteous and gracious both in victory and defeat.

**Attitude:** Remember, you are in charge of your attitude. It is the most important attribute that we have directly in our control. Therefore it's vitally important that you choose to

have a positive, optimistic outlook at all times. Many great athletes never even give themselves a chance to succeed because their attitude is negative, or they spend so much time and energy worrying about things they can't control. One of my favorite quotes is "*whether you think you can or you can't, you're probably right.*" So every night before you go to bed, look in the mirror and ask yourself how your attitude was today. If it was not positive and inspiring then change it! It's that simple. Make playing a labor of love!

**Model the Way:** Yes, that's right, you are a role model and you must understand and accept the responsibility that goes along with the goals you've set for yourself of becoming a big-timer. Once you understand its significance, it can be an internally inspiring force that gets you going on those days you think nobody cares. The great ones understand that it's what you do when you think nobody is watching that's really important. Because invariably there is someone always watching! Accept the challenge.

**Pride:** Every time you practice or play, you always autograph the quality of your effort with the name on the back of your shirt ... your family name. Also, when you play a game, you represent your team with the name on the front of the shirt. It's absurd for me to think that to give less than 100 percent effort at all times is not possible. "If it's to be, it's up to me" is another one of my favorite quotes.

**Initiative:** Be a leader. Come up with ideas to make yourself a better athlete, a better person and a better player. Go out and buy 10 balls and a ball bag, so you have no excuse not to train. Go to a top college or pro game and actually study the player from whom you can learn something. Read a soccer book. Watch a soccer video. Continue to log on to websites. You get the idea. Some people dream big and others wake up and realize their dreams. So get going, now!

**Overcome:** Invariably, it will not be an easy road to your ultimate success. You will face obstacle after obstacle. Your persistence and ability to overcome adversity, frustration and disappointment, and all other obstacles that come your way will determine the heights you reach. Many times, the actual exhilaration we feel when we accomplish something worthy is directly proportional to the number of obstacles we had to overcome along the way. Make all obstacles your challenges (speed bumps), and go out and conquer them!

**Never say never:** Never stop believing in yourself. Sometimes, we have to change our destinations or the roads we take to get us there, but don't ever quit. Promise yourself that you will always work hard and always persevere to the very end! Quitters never win and winners never quit! I'll never forget the first time that the Houston Rockets won the NBA Championship and a reporter asking Hakeem Olajuwon, "how does it finally feel to be Champion?" After a few seconds of pause, Hakeem looked at the reporter and said, "*it feels great to have won, but I don't need a trophy to tell me that I am now a champion. I feel like every day I am a champion by the way I train, play and live my life.*"

I thought it was perhaps the best response I have ever heard by an athlete and in part has inspired me to put in perspective what athletics is all about.

I hope this will inspire you to take a more active role in your own future.