

# GAME

# ON!

THE TEAM  
GIRLS GUIDE  
TO KEEPING  
TEENAGERS  
ACTIVE



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**WE  
ARE  
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GIRLS**

A typographic poster with the text "WE ARE TEAM GIRLS" in large, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The text is arranged in four lines. Each letter is filled with a different photograph of a young woman. The first line, "WE", shows a woman against a red and white brick wall. The second line, "ARE", shows a woman against a teal and white brick wall. The third line, "TEAM", shows a woman in a white top and green skirt against a teal and white brick wall. The fourth line, "GIRLS", shows a woman's legs in colorful socks and sneakers on a wooden floor.

## Meet the Authors



*We know what you're thinking...*

*At first glance our authors don't seem that much alike.*

Clare's a former Australian international representative netball player. Bec's a writer. Clare's perfect day is going for a hike. Bec's perfect day is sitting inside on the couch with a good book. Clare spent her school years playing netball, basketball and on the athletics track. Bec spent her school years writing school plays, working on the school magazine and trying to figure out ways to get out of doing PE. Clare lives and breathes sport. And Bec? Well Bec lives and breathes Netflix and pepperoni pizza. Clare's naturally sporty and Bec really, really, REALLY is not.

But here's what they do have in common.

They both played team sport in primary school and high school and loved it. And that's what this book is all about.

It's about the amazing benefits girls experience from putting on the bib or tying up their shoes and getting out there on the court, on the field or in the water. Regardless of whether you're a sports nut like Clare or an indoorsy book-worm like Bec (or maybe a bit of both!), playing sport offers every girl the chance to feel strong, capable, and confident during those tricky teen years. Sport gave both Clare and Bec a sense of belonging in high school.

And that's what Team Girls is all about.

Suncorp's Team Girls initiative is all about championing Australian girls and encouraging them to be confident with their ideas, their abilities and in what their bodies can do. On the court and off.

So, are you ready to explore how to help your daughter discover the absolute joy of playing sport? GAME ON!



# About the authors



## Clare McMeniman

Clare McMeniman is a former Australian Diamond & Queensland Firebirds netballer and Suncorp Team Girls Ambassador.

After debuting for the Queensland Firebirds in 2007, she became Vice-Captain of the Firebird's inaugural ANZ Championship team and was involved in the team's three ANZ Championship Premiership victories. In 2014, following a 2 year hiatus from netball, Clare returned to the elite level and debuted as the 163rd Australian Netball player and was appointed as the Diamonds Captain in 2016.

Away from the court, Clare completed a Graduate Entry Masters of Speech Pathology at the University of Queensland and worked periodically during her sporting career. Since retiring in 2016, she has remained actively engaged in the Australian netball community as a Suncorp Team Girls ambassador and is a passionate advocate for investing in the self-development and growth of our next generation of netballers, both on and off the court.

Clare and former team mate Laura Geitz, continue to educate, enlighten and inspire girls and their parents about the integral role that sports participation plays in building healthy, confident and well supported young women through their program Fuel2Fly presented by Suncorp.

## Rebecca Sparrow

Over the past 25 years Rebecca Sparrow has been a travel writer, a magazine editor, a newspaper columnist, a TV scriptwriter and a novelist.

She is the author of three best-selling novels *The Girl Most Likely*, *The Year Nick McGowan Came to Stay*, and *Joel and Cat Set The Story Straight* (co-authored with Nick Earls).

Since 2009 Rebecca has focused on writing non-fiction books for teenage girls to help them navigate those tricky high school years. Those books include *Find Your Tribe (and 9 other things I wish I'd known in high school)*; *Find Your Feet (The 8 things I Wish I'd Known Before I Left High School)* and the best-selling *Ask Me Anything (heartfelt answers to 65 anonymous questions from teenage girls)*.

Aside from writing books Rebecca writes for Mamamia.com.au, co-hosts the award-winning health and happiness podcast *The Well* with good friend Robin Bailey and talks to thousands of high school students every year about friendship, resilience, giving back and life online. Rebecca is an ambassador for Givit.org.au, The Pyjama Foundation, and Team Girls.

She is also a sherpa to three small children at home.

# Introduction

**Team Girls is a Suncorp initiative dedicated to fostering and promoting girls participation in sport. It's about girls (and their family and friends) supporting girls, building up their confidence, and knowing they're stronger when they stand together – on and off the court.**

In 2017, we launched Team Girls with Netball Australia in response to a startling statistic: nearly 50% of all girls stop playing sport by age 17. You see, we know that sport builds confidence. The more confident girls are now, the more successful they can be later in life. So we've committed to changing the score by decreasing the dropout rate in sport.

Let's build a nation of confident girls.

Let's change the score.

## TEAM GIRLS

# Can sport really help to grow my daughter's confidence?

# Yes. Yes. Yes.

So often when we talk about kids and sport we make the mistake of focusing solely on the benefits exercise has to their physical health.

With adults and kids today tending to lead a more sedentary lifestyle than past generations, we naturally focus on our desire to get our kids off the couch, away from their devices and moving their bodies.

And that's certainly important, but research tells us there are other equally important benefits to regular physical activity (by regular physical activity I'm talking about activity that lasts for 30 minutes or longer which gives our kids an elevated heart rate.) It could be anything from power walking with the dog to dance classes or being on the school soccer team.

**According to research, when our kids get regularly active it...**

- Strengthens their self-esteem
- Helps them manage their stress levels
- Alleviates feelings of depression and anxiety

- Enhances their mood
- Boosts their mental alertness  
(Getting active helps boost our focus and helps our kids' concentrate)
- Improves school academic performance
- Reduces their drug and alcohol consumption.

When we're physically active it gives us a chance to push past limiting self-beliefs. We can experience the joy or high of improving (whether that's shooting hoops or roller-skating) and feel physically strong and more capable. All of this builds our self-esteem and positive body image.

Being active gives our kids a chance to have a mental health break from worrying about school or friendship issues as they focus on swimming laps, chasing a ball or remembering choreography.

At a time when anxiety and mental health issues amongst teenage girls are on the rise, this is all good news.



# So why is SPORT so important?

**Can't we just encourage our girls to go for a walk every day? Good question. Going for a walk or a jog is terrific BUT when you encourage your daughter to play a team sport it adds an extra layer of benefits.**

You'll be helping her experience additional rewards like;

- The chance to make new friends (if they're outside of school – all the better!)
- Critical life skills such as;
  - the importance of teamwork
  - how to be a leader
  - how to handle winning and losing
  - how to process/manage feedback
  - the importance of commitment
  - the dynamics of group co-operation
  - developing her communication skills
  - time away from her devices
  - and resilience.

These are all skills which are incredibly important for our kids to have later in life as they navigate further study, workplaces, and relationships.

Forming friendships outside of school is always a good idea.

And building our girls' resilience is crucial. Increasingly we are a generation of parents who try to shield our children from experiencing failure or feeling moments of disappointment. The end result is that our kids are less resilient and more likely to struggle at the first bump in the road. Sport actively builds that inner grit we all need to handle life. Matches are won and lost. We screw up on the court or field. We miss out on places in teams. We're expected to take

constructive feedback on the chin. But each week, we still show up to play. And that ability to roll with the punches is critical to our kids' ongoing success as human beings.

Many parents also mention that sport gives their girls something to focus on other than social media and dramas unfolding online. Having hobbies and interests away from life online is key for all our kids.

Take a look at this research that came from the Atlassian: "The imagination gap report 2018" (in partnership with the AFL).

- Women who played team sport as children say it helped them develop skills like collaboration and teamwork (88%), communication and social skills (83%), flexibility and adaptability (82%), confidence, and resilience (80%)
- 75% of women say team sports improved their ability to give and receive feedback, while 67% credit it with the development of leadership skills
- The research shows those who play team sport are significantly more likely to reach managerial and other roles of responsibility. Continuing to play into adulthood increases this likelihood
- They're more likely to meet their goals, handle what comes their way, feel prepared, find solutions to problems and stay calm in the face of adversity.

Now that you've realised the great benefits of physical activity and the advantages of playing sport, the next step is helping your daughter choose the physical activity that lights her up...



# Getting started

## How do you help your daughter choose a sport to play?



**Bec**

**My daughter Ava loves netball. Her best friend Lulu lives and breathes gymnastics. Her cousin Elouise is obsessed with basketball and hip-hop dance classes and her neighbour Phoebe prefers swimming.**

Like everything in life, we all prefer different things. And the same is true for sport. Some of us prefer individual sports like swimming or squash while others love being on a team playing hockey, rugby or netball. Some people love being in or on the water. Others love running around a field or a court.

Some kids seem to love every sport they try their hand at. Other kids find it a little harder to discover the right sport for them. And that's the thing; finding the right sport for your daughter can be a case of trial and error. Part of the decision may be dictated by practicalities such as costs and training commitments for example.

Then there's how your daughter feels about the sport. She may be influenced by which sports her friends are playing, any sports you currently play or played as a teenager or even the sportswomen she sees on the TV like Moana Hope, Ellyse Perry, Anna Meares, Serena Williams and Gabi Simpson.

Take all of that into account as you decide on a sport to try. With my daughter we started off trying soccer, but my daughter just didn't love it. She didn't feel confident on the field and was always reluctant to play.

It wasn't her thing. The next year we swapped to club netball and we haven't looked back. She's excited to get out on the court every week.



Clare

**I grew up with 3 older brothers who were obsessed with sport; backyard games of soccer, touch football**

**and cricket were a daily occurrence for our family, but none of those sports appealed to me.**

For me, I was happiest when I was dancing. My parents tried to expose me to other activities during the 'ballet off season' including a one-off cameo appearance at swimming squad (I actually stopped mid-lap and got out of the pool because I disliked it so much) and Little Athletics but despite their encouragement to continue, I had absolutely no desire to return to either activity.

It wasn't until the latter stages of primary school that organised team sport started to appeal to me. I was exposed to netball through school PE lessons and had friends who were already playing club netball on the weekends. After playing a few games at school I instantly wanted to play more.

Fridays and Saturdays soon became my favourite part of the week because it was my opportunity to play netball with my friends.

What I always appreciated about my parents was their patience in helping me to find something that I truly gained enjoyment from without pressuring me to participate in something for the sake of it.

They supported me to trial & test different sports and commit to one when I was ready.

So now let's move to the next step: signing up!



# Signing up to play

## School Sport

Most schools, depending on their size, offer kids the chance to play a variety of sports. And there are terrific benefits to playing sport through school;

- School sport is often a great place to taste a number of different sports before committing to an organised competition or regular sessions
- Trying something new in a supportive environment with familiar faces
- For busy families extra-curricular activities can be tricky with pick-ups and drops-offs. With school sport there's only one drop-off and pick up point in a day.

## Club Sport

Your other option is usually club sport. Again, most sports have local clubs where kids can sign up to play for a season;

- Club sport often allows your child to step out of the school bubble and create a new friendship circle away from school
- School teams can sometimes limit the number of children who are able to participate in a sport. If your child isn't selected for a school team, a club team is a wonderful alternative
- During the teen years (and the friendship dramas that can ensue) a club team can be a reprieve from the school yard turmoil experienced by many young girls
- Exposure to new role models/supportive adult figures in coaches and club staff who can help your child to identify their unique traits and attributes. Club sports can often be an environment in which kids flourish away from the classroom
- Sense of being part of a team culture. Your child gets to pull on their club colours each week and share a set of values and standards with their team mates.



Clare

For over 100 years, Australian netball communities have provided an environment for young girls to engage with their peers, form lifelong friendships, showcase their strengths, celebrate their differences, and feel valued.

On grass and bitumen courts every Saturday, young netballers are developing their ability to work with others, communicate, inspire those around them and make their team mates feel empowered to do the same. High-fives, huddles, war cries, giggles and smiles instantly create a sense of belonging and a place where they can be the most authentic versions of themselves.

Growing up in country Queensland, inter-school sport in grades six and seven was the highlight of the week. I remember the excitement of being able to hang out with a variety of school friends every Friday and have fun meeting other girls from the surrounding schools in our area.

Let me tell you, as a 12-year-old, I was quite insecure about my height. Regardless of how many times my parents told me being tall was beautiful I just couldn't quite grasp that it was true. As a result, I tended to be shy in new social settings. It was exposure to team sport - particularly in a supported school environment - which demonstrated to me the value that each individual brought to different roles within the team setting. I started to open my eyes to my personal strengths and the strengths of those around me. It clicked that tall could not just be beautiful, but amazing, intimidating, strong and fierce! Netball helped me feel comfortable in my own skin.

Developing a love and joy for physical activity through involvement in primary school sport was the catalyst that helped to uncover my confidence as an adolescent. I found engaging in new high school environments and club sport to be a lot easier after this and whilst still nervous and shy at times, I wasn't as afraid of stepping outside my comfort zone to meet new people and take on new challenges.



# How many sports is too many?

There's no right or wrong answer here. It's really an individual decision dependent on your family's schedule and your child's ability to balance sporting practice with school study and other commitments. It's certainly probably more manageable to do several school sports rather than commit to numerous sporting clubs.

Keep in mind teens can feel overwhelmed by time-management and organisation. So, if several sports are on the calendar, it's worth sitting down with your child and helping them create a plan around their practice requirements and then helping them stick to it.

The more organised they are with their schoolwork, and other commitments (e.g. part-time jobs, family, volunteering etc.), the more easily they will be able to fit several sports into their week.

Another option is to choose summer and winter sports. This way your child is experiencing a range of sports in the year without as much overlap when it comes to training commitments and costs.





# Hang on! My daughter hates sport. What now?



**Bec**

**I hear you. This was me at different stages during high school. I said I hated sport and wore it as part of my identity. But in truth**

**I LOVED playing netball and enjoyed PE when it involved the class playing soccer or tennis (I wasn't so keen on swimming or athletics). So, I think this is where we need to reframe the way we look at sport.**

A lot of kids who aren't particularly athletic or who have a bad experience with PE at school, quickly label themselves as 'unsporty'. But there's more to sport than school PE lessons! And it's not about someone being 'sporty' or 'unsporty' – it's about finding an activity that you enjoy that gets you moving. That's it. You don't have to be the best at it. You don't have to play every day but in order for our girls to have a balanced life while they're at school, we want them doing a physical activity that gets them away from books, study and assignments and has them running around and getting red in the face! Maybe they hate swimming and cross country at school. I get it. But maybe they're a natural Wing Defence on the netball court or have a killer tennis backhand. Maybe they can walk a beam in gymnastics with precision.

The benefits of playing sport are too important to write sport off with a simple, "I'm not sporty." Turn to the back of this book and ask your daughter to make a list of three sports she'd be curious to try and go from there. Be willing to move past the traditional sports and think about karate, fencing, rowing, rock climbing, boxing and obstacle courses (think Ninja Warrior!). If that fails, then the most important thing is that your daughter is doing some physical activity every day if possible. Focus on physical activity she enjoys: dancing, roller skating, yoga, jogging, even group exercise classes. Take the focus off competitive sports and onto enjoyment. After all, there's nothing wrong with walking the dog every morning before school!



# Balancing act

## How to fit sport/physical activity into an already busy teenage timetable

Life for so many teenagers is really busy. REALLY busy. They've got school commitments, homework and study to stay on top of. They've got their friends to see plus they're expected to participate in family activities too or maybe hold down a part-time job. It's a lot, I know. It's around the age of 15 that kids tend to drop sport in order to have less stress in their lives. But that's the last thing they should be doing when we know that sport boosts our teens' academic performance, self-esteem and mental health.

So, what is the best way forward?

It's worth looking at your daughter's schedule together and seeing if you can work smarter not harder. What I mean by that is, see if you can clear some space so that she's still got time for training and a weekly game without feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Maybe it means dropping some other sports and just focusing on the one she loves the best. And then you can reassess at the end of the season and see how she feels.

Maybe you shift from competitive participation to lessons/coaching. Maybe it's about considering non-sport related physical activities such as dancing, walking, yoga, group exercise classes and maximising the enjoyment gained from those activities.

### Lessons learned:

- The importance of time management
- The need to identify and prioritise what is important
- Maintaining balance – ensuring you allow time for self, family, friends
- Acknowledging that it's OK to not be able to cope 100% of the time and know who you can turn to for help.



Clare

**People are often surprised when they learn that I didn't play a variety of sports outside of school during high school. My two main sports were athletics and netball.**

Don't get me wrong, I always participated in inter-house swimming, cross-country and loved weekly PE classes but was always conscious of not committing to too many things outside of school. This was because I played in a number of different netball teams (at any one time I could be training for 3-4 teams at once), but more-so because academics was a priority within my family. When I started high school, my parents and I made the decision that I would participate in extra-curricular team sports in Terms 1-3 but in Term 4 I would only do athletics which didn't require me to commit to anything on the weekends. During Terms 1-3 I had a weekly timetable that ensured I was fitting in time for homework and if I was struggling to complete an assignment on time or fit in study due to training or competition I knew I could always speak up and ask for help, either from my parents or teachers. The agreement I had with my parents however, was that I had to make an effort to be proactive in asking for help and not leave it to the last moment. If I was sinking, it was often a sign I had over committed to one element of my life and I needed to sit down with Mum and Dad to re-assess how I was coping with my current schedule. Term 4 was always my opportunity to have some downtime, enjoy time with my family and friends and study.

# What to do when

## My daughter wants to ditch sport

The first step and the most important step is to try and find out why! Ask her why and really listen to what she says before you jump in with solutions. There are nearly always solutions to these problems, but it's important your daughter feels heard.

### Ask your daughter:

- Does she need strategies to assist with internal team conflict or a problem with a coach or official? Or if she feels unable to manage the conflict, does she simply want to change clubs or teams?
- Would she prefer to play/trial another sport instead of the one she is currently playing?
- Are there other conflicts from outside the sporting environment – work, friends, relationships which are starting to consume her time?
- Is academic stress starting to play a role?
- Has all the fun gone because she has moved up to a higher grade and it's too serious? Can she reduce her hours of commitment and drop down to a lower grade or competition that may not be as competitive but still enjoyable?
- Would she prefer to participate in non-sport related physical activities instead of organised sport? Think about how you can best support her to do this. Take the focus off competitive sport and onto finding a physical activity she enjoys which gets her moving.



Bec

**Twelve months ago my niece decided she wanted to quit basketball. She was over it. But her aunt and I talked to her and realised it was more about the team than the sport itself. So, this year she changed teams and now she's back LOVING basketball again. It's important to listen to our kids and hear what they're saying, but also realise you can often problem-solve the issues which are bugging them.**

***Data shows that children are more likely to participate in organised physical activity outside school hours if a parent participates in sports or physical activity (75%)\*.***

\*Australian Sports Commission, "Children's Participation in Organised Physical Activity Outside of School Hours"

## What to do when

My daughter is anxious about making the team with her friends

I think we've all been there! It's so much easier in life to do activities when your friends are by your side. But one of the great joys in life is unexpected friendships! And while it can feel terrifying to step outside your comfort zone, especially if you're shy, the benefits of making new friends (outside of your usual gang) are enormous. Having a wide friendship circle, particularly outside of school, is always a good thing.



Clare

**Playing in teams away from my friends has meant I've met and become friends with people who I never**

**would've met otherwise! And while it's scary at times, it's worth overcoming some nerves to make it happen. The relationships and memories I formed along the way have been priceless!**

My daughter can't get into a school team

She's not alone. This is a common issue particularly with popular sports where there are limited spots on offer. You have a few options here – you can chat to the PE teacher and ask for feedback for next season. What does your daughter need to work on? What would they suggest for her moving forward? Some PE teachers will help direct students to other sports in which they think they'll excel. Take that feedback and run with it! Also keep in mind that missing out on a team is painful but also a necessary part of life. Disappointment and failure will help build your daughter's resilience muscle.



Bec

**In year 10 when I missed out on a spot in the A, B and C netball teams, my friends and I formed a D-Team! Somehow, we**

**convinced other schools to also put a D-Team together and we played every Saturday with everyone else. We had an absolute ball!**

**I'm not sure you could get away with creating a rogue D-Team now but back then it was a great alternative. Sometimes you miss out on school teams (for a whole host of reasons that have nothing to do with you not being good enough). Don't let it get you down.**





# What to do when My daughter thinks she isn't good enough

Self-confidence and self-belief can be fragile when you're a tween and a teen.

It's tough when you love a sport, but you feel like everyone else has surpassed you. Remind your daughter that being a valued member of a team isn't simply about physically being the best player. There's the person who is great at keeping the team motivated and the person who is reliable and always makes sure everyone knows the schedule. A team captain isn't always the strongest or fastest player – they're the person who has the ability to LEAD the team by inspiring them and helping each team member see their value. So, for starters, tell her not to sell herself short just yet!

If she's really feeling like she's out of her depth, then you could drop her down a level or grade. Or you could find a community team that is less competitive and more social?

If she truly believes her abilities are holding her back, more practice or personal coaching may help. Commit with your daughter to maybe heading out on the weekends to practise her skills and see if together you can get her back up to speed.

And remind your daughter that you just love seeing her play. It's not about goals or runs or being the best. It's about her being out there having a go. It's about turning up to practice. Learning to be a team player. Showing grace and courage even in defeat. It's about being part of a team.



## What to do when

My daughter thinks her team has become too serious. She's no longer having fun.



Clare

**When we're young we all play sport for the love and enjoyment of the game but as we get older, the competitive nature of sport often takes precedence.**

What happens when sport becomes 'too serious' for your child? The coach or her teammates might be starting to take it to the next level with how they approach training and matches.

If your daughter isn't enjoying a more competitive environment it's important to identify the reasons why. There's a huge difference between only wanting to be engaged in sport for enjoyment versus your daughter lacking self-belief that she's capable of meeting expectations and standards.

There's nothing wrong with a 15-year-old no longer wanting to play competitive sport. There are still physical, emotional and mental health benefits to purely playing sport for enjoyment!

It's often when we push teens to compete at a serious level that we see them dropping out from sport. In this instance, an emphasis on playing for enjoyment and focusing on the wonderful things that come from being immersed in a team or sporting environment are a great talking point. Your daughter can still be a part of a competitive environment and enjoy herself if she remembers why she started playing in the first place. Because it was fun! But if this is too hard then moving to a less competitive level might be the way to go. Your daughter can remain engaged in the sport long term which is the optimal outcome in a situation like this.

For those girls who are lacking self-belief in relation to their abilities within this environment, this is a great opportunity to introduce concepts surrounding goal setting and resilience. Sporting environments often mirror life situations for children quite nicely and this can be used as a great learning opportunity in relation to goal setting and resilience, development of positive self-talk, and how your child can use these beyond the sporting pitch.

# TEAM GIRLS

# What to do when Grading happens



Clare

**Life is amazing but it's also hard and one of life's harder moments is when you miss out on a place in the team you wanted to be in.**

But no one's journey to success is an easy one and part of having the courage to put yourself forward for a sporting team or the school play or anything else is the possibility you'll be rejected. It hurts but it's also a big part of life.

It's okay to be disappointed especially when you've set a goal to be in a certain team but now it's about how you respond to this situation and move on from it.

- Think about how you choose to behave around those who are selected in your place. Congratulating them on their success (although this can be a hard thing to do), not blaming others for missed selection and thinking about your body language in these moments
- Moving forward: how can you make the most of the situation you are in? Can you set new goals? What are some key areas you can work on to improve your game?

Every athlete, every writer, every actor, every singer, every person you admire has had to deal with defeat and disappointment. I've missed out on teams. Bec has missed out on writing opportunities.

A good way forward is to identify inspirational stories/Instagram pages/quotes for your child to gain inspiration from. Read the *Confidence Code for Girls* and *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls*. Google Turia Pitt and see what you find.

**Most of all remember that as a parent – you set the tone. Parents who have meltdowns and abuse coaches or selectors can be a huge problem in children's sport. Maybe you feel frustrated. Maybe you feel like your daughter got a raw deal.**

**Either way that's part of life unfortunately, and now is the time to role model graciousness and acceptance. If our kids never experience failure or disappointment, they won't be equipped for the real world. Instead allow them the opportunity to bounce back and grow from the experience.**

# What to do when Injuries happen



Clare

**If I could wave a magic wand and stop your child from ever getting injured – I would. But injuries are a part of sport.**

I think the most important thing here is to ensure you and your child are aware of what will be involved in the recovery process and the time-period for which they won't be able to play or train.

Sit down and set goals to assist with your child's ability to handle the disappointment of 'missing out'.

Speak to the coach or teacher about how your child can still be involved in training sessions and matches such as umpiring, scoring, taking stats, cheering. The silver lining here is it can assist your child to understand the different roles involved in making a team successful and that you can still contribute in a meaningful way, be inspirational to your team mates, and impact a team's success when you're not playing. Identify a source of inspiration for your child to keep them motivated when they are finding times tough. The majority of athletes have had time off with injuries – find some stories about how they coped in those times.





