

Think Like **an** *UNDER DOG*

TURN SLIM CHANCES INTO ENDLESS
POSSIBILITIES TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE.

by Amanda Gleason illustrations by Adam Larkum



Until June 30, 2016, Coastal Carolina University had never won a national championship in any sport.

That all changed in Game 3 of the College World Series at Omaha's TD Ameritrade Park. In the bottom of the ninth inning, pitcher Alex Cunningham struck out Arizona's Ryan Haug—securing the title win for the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers and giving the first-time College World Series participants the chance to raise the coveted trophy.

"I completely blacked out for a solid two-and-a-half minutes," Alex says. "I saw myself on the interview, and I don't even remember taking that interview."

His excitement is understandable, especially when you consider that no College World Series team had won the title in its first appearance in the finals in 60 years.

"From the day we walked in there, we were kinda playing with house money," says Gary Gilmore, Chanticleers head coach. "There weren't a whole lot of expectations by all of the prognosticators—we were big-time underdogs in that whole deal."

Yet Gary and his coaching staff focused on factors outside of others' expectations.

"There are so many things that we can't control," Gary says. "The things we can, we want to be in complete control of: things like our preparation, how we do things to get ready for the

game—things as simple as what time we go to bed at night. We don't let the situation become bigger than life to us."

One way the team maintained focus was simply by relaxing. "I don't think anyone on our team felt pressure," Gary says. A big reason for that: Gary discovered a newfound calmness in his coaching career last year, a trait he says came over him once he started reading the Bible every day.

"I think the calmer I was, the calmer the team was," Gary says. "There were several times in the playoffs when we did dumb things, and maybe five or 10 years ago, I would have come in the dugout and slung a helmet, let out some profanity and blown off steam. This time, I'd say, 'Hey guys, not a problem. We'll get them the next inning.'"

After a hard loss in Game 1, Gary remembers praying for the right words to say to his crew. He walked into the locker room and started clapping in front of his bewildered team. "I told them that I was in the locker room of a national champion, and here's what we're going to do for the next two days."

Gary relayed who would pitch, who would relieve and what kind of success they were going to have. "I knew I had to make them believe that we could do it. We had lost, but we weren't out."

And believing, it turns out, made all the difference. "Talent is on a piece of paper," Gary explains. "We weren't the most talented team there, but we played the best. I've coached one or two other

teams that on paper had significantly more talent. And yet this team found a way to make it work."

ROOT, ROOT, ROOT FOR THE UNDERDOG

It's no secret that most people love to pull for the underdog. Countless studies have backed up this phenomenon, including one published in 2007 in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. When 71 participants were asked which imaginary team—one ranked higher than the other—they hoped would prevail in an Olympic swimming event, 75 percent said they preferred to see the lower-ranked team win.

"People love to be awed and inspired," says Caroline Miller, a certified professional coach and author of *Creating Your Best Life* and *Getting Grit*, to be released in June. "It's built into our DNA." She says the inspiration we feel when we see people outperform themselves causes us to release oxytocin, frequently referred to as the "love hormone"—which makes it easy to see why we get so attached to underdogs.

This affinity for the "little guy" extends beyond sports. Southwest Airlines, Apple and even political candidates have gained notoriety and loyal followings due to underdog status.

That makes you wonder: What if we could tap into the mindset of underdogs? What enables them to



TOP: Pitcher Alex Cunningham #18 and catcher David Parrett #12 of the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers embrace after striking out the final batter to beat the Arizona Wildcats 4-3 to win the College World Series Championship on June 30, 2016. BELOW: Head coach Gary Gilmore (left) and player Anthony Marks (center) of the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers celebrate with the team.

overcome the odds, and how can it be developed?

In his 2013 book *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, Malcolm Gladwell explains how we often overlook the advantages that go along with being an underdog. He writes: "It can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable."

HOW SWEET IT IS

It turns out, we can learn a lot from all types of underdogs—whether we're talking about a College World Series team or two self-described "hippie-dippy" 20-somethings with a love of ice cream and breaking the rules.

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield met while running track in seventh grade gym class, the two slowest of the pack—quite fitting for the duo, as their underdog status would follow them into adulthood and eventually be their claim to fame.

By the mid-1970s, Jerry had tried unsuccessfully to get into medical school, while Ben had dropped out of college and attempted to become a potter—only no one wanted to buy his pottery.

The solution: They liked hanging out, and they liked eating, so they



decided to go into the food business together. Their two favorite foods were ice cream and bagels, and since the machinery required for bagel-making came with a much heftier price tag than that of ice cream, the decision was simple.

In 1978, Ben & Jerry's first scoop shop opened in Burlington, Vermont, and beloved flavors like Chunky Monkey were born. As their local popularity began to grow, the pair began to package their ice cream into pint containers and sell it to restaurants and mom-and-pop

shops. By the early 1980s, they had set their sights on their first major market: Boston.

As they approached store owners there, they learned that business representatives from Haagen-Dazs—which sold to the same supermarkets—had issued an ultimatum to store owners: If they agreed to sell Ben and Jerry's product, then they would not sell them Haagen-Dazs, a major moneymaker for the distributors.

Ben and Jerry filed a class action lawsuit against Pillsbury, Haagen-Dazs'



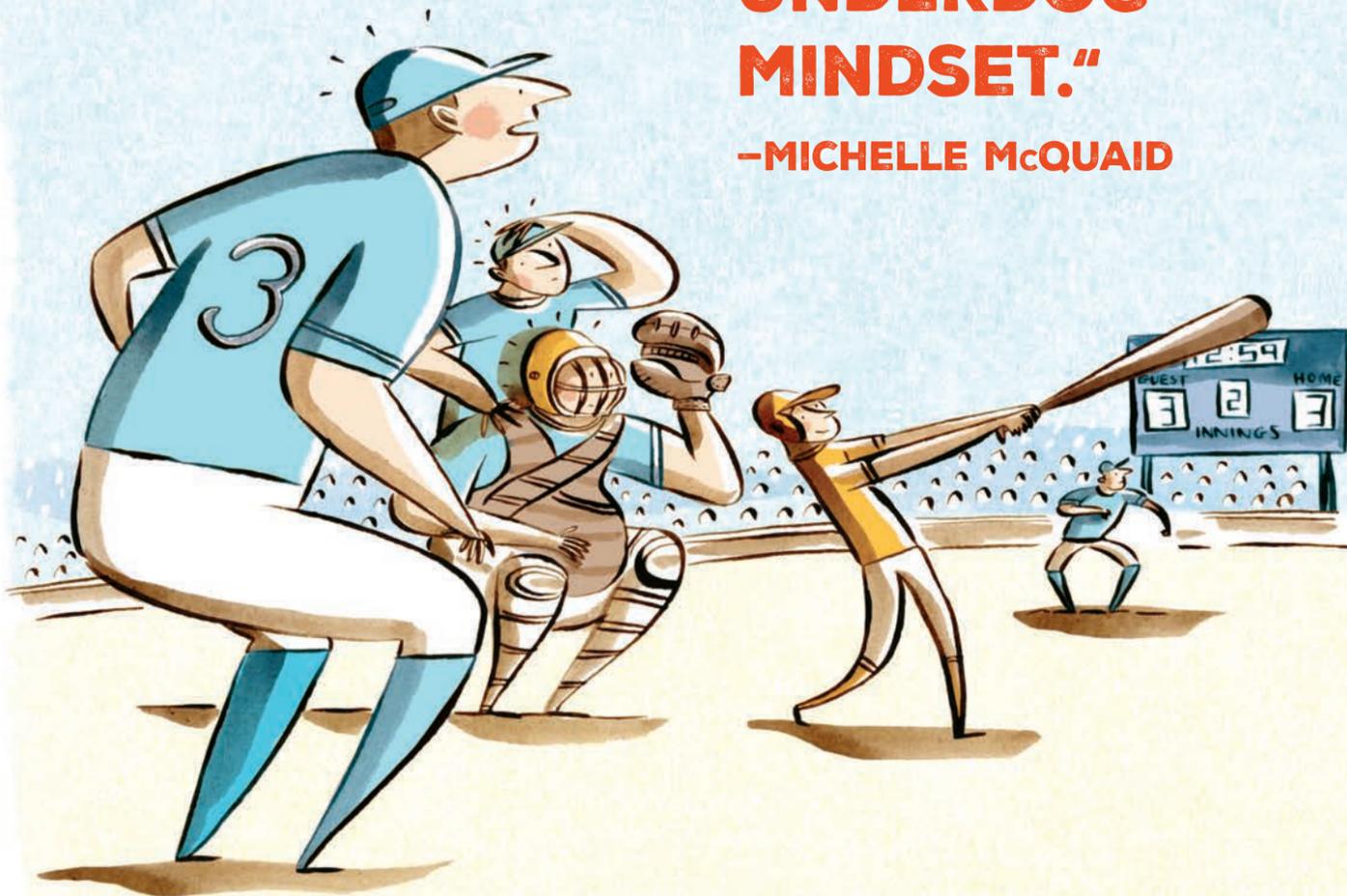
"IF YOU'RE AN UNDERDOG, IT MEANS YOU'RE DEFINITELY NOT GUARANTEED A WIN—YOU'RE SHOOTING FOR THE MOON."

—CAROLINE MILLER



"THERE'S A CURIOSITY THAT HELPS WHEN WE'RE IN THAT UNDERDOG MINDSET."

—MICHELLE McQUAID



parent company, but drawn-out legal battles weren't a viable option for the small company. They knew they would run out of financial resources before the more established business. So what's an underdog to do?

"Ben and I learned to use every tool possible as underdogs, and the biggest resource we had was people," Jerry says. "We didn't have money. We didn't have size to leverage. We had the opportunity to use our people to make a difference."

And so they got creative. The company launched the storied "What's the Doughboy Afraid?" campaign, taking out signs on buses, designing T-shirts and including an 800-number on the product packaging. Customers who called were treated to an answering machine message of the co-founders explaining the situation. If they left their address, a campaign bumper sticker was mailed to them. Taking their underdog cause to the streets ignited a passionate following, and Pillsbury soon backed down due to public pressure.

These days, Ben & Jerry's, which became a Unilever subsidiary in 2000, operates some 600 scoop shops in 35 countries. The company maintains an independent board of directors to "ensure we're making the best ice cream possible in the best way possible," as stated on benjerry.com.

"There's a curiosity that helps when we're in that underdog mindset," explains Michelle McQuaid, best-selling author and workplace well-being teacher. "It goes hand-in-hand with the strength of creativity and being willing to try new ways of doing things, rather than accepting that there's only one path to success."

Also key to an underdog's success is maintaining that mindset even after finding success. "In terms of what we spend on marketing and sales, there hasn't been a significant change from when we were a small underdog business," says Sean Greenwood, the

"grand poobah" of public relations for Ben & Jerry's and a nearly 30-year employee. "That forces us to be creative and keeps pushing us to use that underdog mindset in the marketplace."

Ben and Jerry didn't fit the mold of your typical businessmen when they launched their ice cream business nearly 40 years ago—and it has made all the difference.

"Embrace who you are and make that your strength," Jerry says. "We wanted to be ice cream 'for the people,' and not an elegant treat just for some. Hold on to your beliefs. If you don't like the way the model is, then think about changing the model to fit who you are."

A GROWTH MINDSET

Everyone has had moments of success—those times when we've pulled something off that we've been working really hard toward. Our brain is flooded with happy endorphins, and we never want the feeling to end. What we probably don't realize, though, is that the high we gain from continued wins can be incredibly addictive.

An interesting thing happens when we become accustomed to success. "Neurologically, it changes some things in our brain," Michelle says. "We start to attach our success to our sense of identity. Then we can begin to fear if we're not the winner, who does that mean we are?"

That's where underdogs have the upper hand, since they're not burdened with that addiction to success. "The underdog mindset takes the pressure down," Michelle says. "It changes the way our brains are working chemically, and it opens us up for learning and growth."

Taking the focus off winning and instead turning our attention toward learning and development is what psychologists call having a growth mindset—a key ingredient to an underdog's success.

Louisa Jewell, a well-being teacher and founder of the Canadian Positive

Psychology Association, says this kind of thinking actually feeds winning behavior. "When you're an underdog with a growth mindset, you think 'I don't have it yet. If I work harder, if I practice more, if I persevere in the face of obstacles, I can get better.'"

A fixed mindset, on the other hand, leads people to believe they either have it or they don't—not leaving much room for improvement. "When we have a fixed mindset around our talents, then it doesn't really propel us into action," Louisa says. "It doesn't really motivate us toward behaviors that allow us to work harder and believe that we could one day be the winner."

Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, Ph.D., is a leading researcher on growth mindset. She discovered high achievers without a growth mindset eventually plateau and achieve less than they're capable of because the anxiety tied to their previous successes becomes overwhelming, leading them to stop taking risks. Those with a growth mindset, however, go on to achieve high levels of success in all areas of their lives since they understand that it's best to keep learning and growing.

"It's not that we don't love a good outcome when we're in a growth mindset," Michelle explains. "We just prioritize the learning over the outcome. The funny thing is, the less we attach to the outcome, the more likely we usually are to get the desired outcome."

According to Caroline, people are often further motivated when they don't quite get to the finish line the first time around—a concept researchers refer to as the psychology of the near miss, which is a type of failure that comes close to being a success.

Take Alex, who before throwing the winning pitch in the 2016 College World Series had lost his high school state



TOP LEFT: In 1986, Ben & Jerry's debuted the Cowmobile to dole out free scoops as part of a marketing drive. **INSET:** Their first shop opened in 1978 in Burlington, Vermont. **LEFT:** Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield at the 2010 global announcement of Ben & Jerry's ice cream going 100 percent fair trade in London.

championship game three years in a row. "That definitely lit a fire in me that hadn't gone away until that final pitch of the World Series," Alex says.

Like Alex, those who have authentic grit—another ingredient to an underdog's success—will be inspired to come back and work harder. Caroline describes authentic grit as the passionate pursuit of hard goals that allows us to take responsible risks and promotes flourishing.

"There's a modicum of failure in everything that we try to achieve," Gary says. "If you stay with it, every time you get knocked down gives you that much more resilience to come back and fight twice as hard."



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How to Think Like an UNDERDOG AND WIN LIKE A CHAMP

The cards may be stacked against you when you're an underdog, but did you know there are strategies you can tap into to help turn the tables in your favor? Below, experts break down five ways to make your underdog status work for you.

USE MENTAL TRICKS: At the 2012 London Olympics, Katie Ledecky won the 800-meter freestyle final in front of a roaring crowd that favored the defending British champion, Rebecca Adlington. As she would come up for air, Katie turned chants of "Rebecca!" into cheers for "Ledecky!" in her head. Using mental tricks like this can help underdogs overcome a perceived disadvantage, such as the crowd rooting for your opponent. —Caroline Miller

DEVELOP PATIENCE: Grit is the kind of thing that requires a certain amount of patience and the ability to sit with delayed gratification. A few ways to develop the trait: Drive the speed limit, set a fitness goal and sit up straight all day. Just have the self-regulation to stick with one goal at a time. —Caroline Miller

RECOGNIZE YOUR STRENGTHS: Even underdogs have personal strengths, and to stay engaged as an underdog it's important to know what your best looks like in order to make progress. Keep using, developing and fine-tuning your strengths so that they're giving you more bang for your buck. —Michelle McQuaid

WORK HARDER THAN EVERYONE ELSE: As much as talent counts, effort counts twice. —Angela Duckworth

TRY DEFENSIVE PESSIMISM: With this strategy, individuals set low expectations for their performance, regardless of how well they've done in the past. Then, they think through all the possible negative outcomes so they're prepared to take action to deal with any of those outcomes. Worry comes from not knowing if you're going to be able to handle whatever comes in the future, so if we set strategies for things that could possibly go wrong, our anxiety levels go down. —Louisa Jewell

Underdogs—and anyone striving for their goals—must also have a strong support system, Gary says. "All of us fail at really anything we try to do in life the majority of the time. We've got to have help from above, great friends and great family there to support us."

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

Studies show us that for athletes to perform at their best, it helps for them to

have fun and play in a carefree way. "Carefree doesn't mean careless or caring less," says Mike Margolies, chief operating officer of Mental Training Inc. and author of *The Athlete Within You*. "It means you're focused on being present."

Think about it this way: Top dogs are usually in a no-win situation. If they win, that was expected. If they don't, it's a huge upset. Those in the favored position are under more pressure so they don't

always perform at their best—an advantage to the underdog.

"An underdog's confidence will start to rise because their expectations are pretty low," Mike explains. "That means they're going to play at a higher level because they can play carefree."

Winning for the underdog is a bonus, since they don't face the same scrutiny as the top dog.

"It was easy for us to play with confidence because we didn't have that bar already set for us," Alex says. "We were just having the time of our lives. There were no expectations to live up to."

The benefits of having fun aren't limited to sports. In 1979, one year after being in business, Ben & Jerry's developed two company philosophies: one focused on giving back to the community, and the second being, "If it's not fun, why do it?"

This importance on having fun is still a huge part of the company's DNA, but the philosophy was phrased as a question on purpose. The co-founders say there were times with their startup business when 80-hour workweeks were the norm and fun wasn't always on the agenda. The key is to know why you're doing it.

"You have to have a sense of passion," Michelle says. "It's really hard to persist as an underdog if what we're chasing isn't meaningful to us, because otherwise falling down just gets too painful for most of us."

Whether it's launching a business, winning a sports title or achieving the countless other goals that lie within us, we've all probably felt at one point like insurmountable odds might get in the way. Luckily, lessons learned from successful underdogs can help guide us on our own paths to success.

"If you're going to be elite, every now and then you're going to have to be an underdog," Caroline says. "If you're an underdog, it means you're definitely not guaranteed a win—you're shooting for the moon. Everyone should learn how to do that." 🌕