Character is defined by what you do when no one is watching. The “All Blacks”, one of the top rugby programs in the world, are comprised of players as equally impressive off the field as they are on it. The team follows pillars of leadership that have elevated them to supreme stature. You can read about it in Legacy by James Kerr (I highly recommend for all athletes). The book is filled with many takeaways; one of my favorite chapters is “Sweep the Sheds”. It explains how the All Blacks clean the locker room spotless after every game. Win or lose, home or away, injured or healthy, they pride themselves on having the character to leave the locker room better than they found it. It is an act of personal discipline and respect.

How does “Sweep the Sheds” relate to us at GW? Some know me directly and some indirectly. All of you should know that I am an “Athlete First” coach. I want to spend my time and energy on creating the best experience for you under our umbrella of strength and conditioning. To assure a positive experience I am focused on providing you the best facilities, resources (supplementation/technology) and coaching (staff) possible. Everyone should be familiar with the BLUE room, one of our two weight rooms in Smith. It was built 2 years ago and has been a tremendous addition to our varsity weight room spaces. The rules regarding the BLUE room are unique. The majority of the nation’s collegiate weight rooms close when the strength staff leaves for the night. The BLUE room does not. If you have the time, the BLUE room is there. It is accessible whenever Smith Center is open as a resource to you. We have given you our trust and expect you to respect the facility. Leaving garbage, benches, bars, dumbbells, and plates unorganized and not racked is unacceptable. It is an added workload to myself and my staff every day. Instead of setting up team lifts, we spend time cleaning up after someone else’s mess.

All I ask is this: please “sweep the sheds” after you train. If you use a bar, bench, or dumbbell, please return it. Leave the blue room better than you found it.
It takes a certain type of person to be a collegiate student athlete. Hours and hours committed to training and competing, balancing academics with athletics, all while physically away from the support systems of home. Drive, ambition, perfectionism, commitment- all potential descriptors of what makes an athlete successful. But should the same characteristics that make an athlete great on the field or in the pool be applied to eating habits?

As a sports dietician, I am always helping athletes work towards their healthiest and best athletic selves. You often hear me speak of the 80/20 guidelines- aim for quality, nutritious foods 80% of the time, and 20% of the time make room for the foods that maybe aren’t so nutritious but perhaps provide a psychological role. Being healthy and fueling for performance isn’t about eating perfect 100% of the time, and here’s why:

1. There is no such thing as a “perfect” diet (except the one that’s perfect for you).
2. Trying to reach something that doesn’t exist can lead to feeling like you failed, which might lead to feeling pretty bad about yourself or giving up on a healthy diet all together.

Healthy eating, even for an athlete, is not about extremes, but rather it’s about being okay in the gray area. Instead of doing “only this” or “none of that”, it’s about deciding when it’s time to fuel for health and performance, and when it’s time to have a food purely for enjoyment.

Try comparing this to your training. Some days, like when you are sick or injured, you have to know your limits and take a step back- you have to know when you really need to rest and recover. Most days you have to push through the discomfort and do what it takes to finish the workout. The same could be said with food- some meals you have to have what you want, not necessarily what you need. But most days you want to make a concerted effort to have the nutritious foods that will fuel your athletic endeavors.

Remember it’s not about what you do at just one meal- it’s about what you do on a consistent and balanced basis. And don’t underestimate the power of food - for both your body and your mind.
Perception is reality- and perspective is everything. What does “training” mean to you? What does “hard” mean to you? Is it waking up at 9am to train? 6am? Staying after practice to put up extra shots, take extra swings, run extra sprints? What happens if you don’t prepare appropriately? You might lose the game, increase your chance of injury or even risk losing playing time. While none of these are desirable, 99.9% of the team, you will still get to go home at the end of the day to family, friends, or roommates.

For the United States military, these same luxuries are not afforded. I recently had the opportunity to attend the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, VA with the baseball team and staff. We were given an inspiring tour by Gunnery Sergeant William Callen, who led us through the many eras of the USMC and history of war. He was humble enough to relate what he does to what athletes do, with one exception- “What we do isn’t that different from you guys. The same principles apply. The only difference is- if we don’t go undefeated, we die.”

Strong words from a strong man- and a scary reality. So, the next time you wake up early to train, stay late for extra work, or even lose a game, ask yourself- “Is it really that bad?” Having the right perspective should lead you to the correct answer.
**Sleep**
Athletes should aim for about 9 hours of sleep each night. This will allow your body and mind to rest and allow for repair processes to take place. One tip sleep experts recommend is trying to reduce the amount of time spent on your phone or watching TV immediately before bed.

**Eat**
Be sure to eat a nutritious meal as soon as possible after competition. A sandwich with lean protein, pasta with chicken and red sauce, or fish and a sweet potato are a few examples of post-competition meals. It is important to give your body the fuel it needs to replenish what was just burned off. If you can’t get a meal within 30 minutes after the competition, try to consume low-fat chocolate milk or a protein bar until you can get a meal. Poor nutrition will not allow your body to get the nutrients it needs to recover and allow for repair processes to take place. Try to focus on making changes that will help, not hinder your performance.

**Stretch**
Immediately after the competition be sure to stretch and/or foam roll in order to reduce any soreness that may come about in the days and hours after competition. It only takes about 15-20 minutes to get in a quality stretch or ice bath. This is time that is going to be well spent if you want to stay on the court, field, pool, or mat. If you are a person who has areas that are tighter than others, spend extra time stretching in your room, or during a study break.

All of these tips can be used to help athletes take better care of their bodies. We all want to help our team win. If that means making sure we stretch or eat a balanced post-game meal in order to recover, then let’s make it happen.

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