NED COTEN

How do you define yourself?

Why athletes, and the rest of us, need to see ourselves as more than what we used to do.

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For many years after I finished playing basketball seriously, I would describe myself as a sportsperson, an athlete or a former basketball player.

It took me a long time to realise that this was a way of holding on to the past, because I hadn't really worked out what was happening in my future. As I became more sure and confident about my life after basketball, I started to think and talk about myself differently, without even noticing.

One of the biggest challenges for any athlete, whether they are still playing or have retired, is the way they see themselves: how they position themselves in life, and what they think about from day to day.

It might seem a trivial matter, but in fact it's essential to building the foundations of a great life after sport.

I'm not suggesting you forget about your sports career. It's essential to who you are as a person, and you should make the most of it. But don't make it the only thing you ever talk about. Others just don't care as much as you do.

Successful people, athletes or not, don't rely on others for their sense of self-worth.

They have an innate sense of self-worth built from their beliefs, the way they see themselves, and confidence in their own abilities. They are excited about the future and the goals they set themselves in every area of their life: financial, emotional, personal, physical and spiritual.

These people have really thought about the way they see themselves, and therefore the way other people see them. Relying on past achievements to validate yourself is a crutch no one should rely on.

This is a really important idea. Too many athletes see themselves as exactly that: just an athlete. They think their only value and purpose in the world is to be on the field, playing. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The great American college basketball coach John Wooden believed his most important task was to grow the person. By developing the whole person, he knew he could ultimately develop a great player. His record is testament to his philosophy: between 1964 and 1975, Wooden's UCLA Bruins

won ten national championships in 12 years, seven of them in a row, a record unrivalled in college sport.

Think about the way you see yourself.

As early as possible in life, whether you're an athlete or not, think about the way you see yourself. Think about your whole life, of which your sport is just one part.

> **Don't just define yourself as an athlete. Define yourself as a successful person, with a particular skill and a particular focus on an athletic career, before going on to other things in life.**

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Don't seek to be a person of Importance.
Seek to be a person of Value.

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