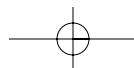


Lisa Fernandez

FEELING FLY



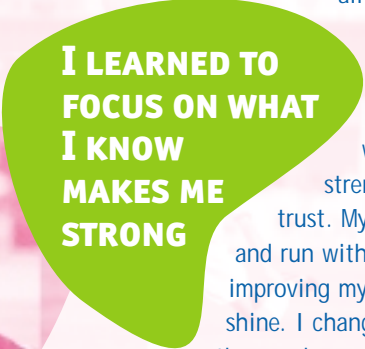
Lisa Fernandez

SOFTBALL, TWO-TIME OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST

You run like a turkey," my coach would yell, making my teammates explode with laughter. Needless to say, when I was 11 years old, my

softball experience was a big girl's nightmare. With nasty sarcasm, my coaches were always busting on me because I was big and slow. It didn't matter what kind of player I would one day become—all that mattered were my tears of embarrassment. Those days at practice I wanted to just shrink and disappear. I felt so down on myself that I wanted to quit all-together the game that I loved.

Lucky for me, my parents were great at taking the hard stuff in life and morphing it into something positive. They constantly boosted me with confidence, reminding me that I was strong and worthy of



**I LEARNED TO
FOCUS ON WHAT
I KNOW
MAKES ME
STRONG**

my place on the team. Instead of making me embarrassed of who I was, they made me proud. "Flex those muscles for me," Dad would always say. We'd watch sports on television, and he'd point out all the great athletes who were big and strong. At games he'd say, "See, Lisa, she's not the fastest—but she sure is good."

Instead of feeling bad about myself and my weaknesses, I learned to start depending on my strengths. It really helped that I had people I could trust. My parents motivated me to pinpoint my talents and run with them. I became a power-hitter and focused on improving my base running. My self-confidence began to shine. I changed from wanting to quit to trying to prove the coaches wrong.

There will always be critics. I am the person and player that I am because I learned to focus on what I know makes me strong, instead of what other people think makes me weak. Success, pride and Olympic medals don't come from listening to the critics, they come from inside of you.

FEELING FLY

Picture yourself. No, really. Close your eyes and paint a picture of yourself in your head. Okay, open them again so you can read the rest of this. How do you see yourself? Is your hair sassy? Do you look smart? Do you like what you see? That picture in your head reveals your self-esteem. High self-esteem means you dig what you see—you're dancing with your chin in the air in your picture. Low self-esteem means you don't necessarily love that image of yourself—you're bummed out about something, you want to change who you are.

*I don't need anyone else
telling me I'm cute to
make me feel good
about myself. I know
I'm superfly.*



Red Flags

Do you:

- ◆ Have frequent negative thoughts about yourself/self-doubts?
- ◆ Decide not to speak up — because you are afraid of embarrassing yourself?
- ◆ Have a lot of trouble making decisions?

Are you:

- ◆ Fearful of trying new things? Are you letting life pass you by?
- ◆ Constantly worried about how you look?
- ◆ Thinking that doing drugs or drinking will help your confidence?

Girls your age have a tendency to trip about self-image. You often don't believe down deep that you are superfly. Actually, twice as many girls as boys have self-confidence problems. Some girls wish everything were a little different—wish they were skinnier, taller, funnier, faster, more popular or whatever. For some gals it's mild, and others get absolutely obsessed with the ways that they aren't cool enough.

Your preteen and teen years are times of crazy change. Your body, your mood, your friends, your schools and a bazillion other things all shift at once. It makes sense that you would look at yourself with confused confidence when all that is going down. What's scary is that as self-esteem weakens, you become more vulnerable and more likely to make sketchy lifestyle choices. Low self-esteem can often lead you to getting hooked on drinking or drugs, depression and eating disorders. Life can easily snowball and turn ugly.

In sports and in life, you need to learn to be your own No. 1 fan. If you don't think you're the bomb, no one else will either. Let sports be the fuel behind your stellar self-esteem. Athletes are strong, bold, confident and smart. Meet the challenges of your changing life as an athlete with your head held high. Above all else, never forget that your self-esteem is one thing that only you can control. Be proud.



RESOURCES

- ✿ www.aboutourkids.org
- ✿ www.girlsinc.org
- ✿ www.girlscouts.org
- ✿ www.newmoon.org
- ✿ www.teenvoices.com