

Winning Attitude

By Christine Yackel

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Caroline Silby knows what it takes to be a world-class athlete. As a youngster, she earned spots on the U.S. national and international figure skating teams and participated in the 1984 Olympic trials. Now a sports psychologist in private practice in Alexandria, Virginia, Silby specializes in the unique problems of adolescent girls. "Competitive figure skating taught me how to win gracefully and recover from defeat," Silby says. "Now I help female athletes learn the mental skills they'll need to succeed."

Although she excelled in skating, Silby never intended to pursue a professional figure skating career. "I'd have ended up a Smurf in the Ice Capades," she says, "so I knew it was time to go to college." She completed a psychology degree at SU and earned a Ph.D. in sports psychology from the University of Virginia.

Drawing upon her own experience, Silby helps young female athletes cope with performance anxiety, body image, sexual harassment, and eating disorders. She conducts motivational seminars and works with individual athletes at all levels of competition. She also wrote *Games Girls Play: Understanding and Guiding Young Female Athletes* (St. Martin's Press), to help parents understand the special needs of their sports-loving daughters.

Silby says it's unfortunate that so many teenage girls lose interest in athletics due to low self-esteem, because female athletes tend to feel more empowered, do better in school, don't do drugs, and are less sexually active. "We're making good progress," she says. "In a few years, I hope to see an explosion of female athletes participating at higher and higher levels."