

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Doing Your Best is Considered a “WIN”

By David Benzel

I learned to redefine winning in the early days of my competitive career because I noticed I didn't have any trophies or medals. It made sense to me that winners have those things, and since I didn't, I must be a loser.

To assist myself on my athletic quest I came up with a new definition that helped me a lot during the day-to-day struggles of training: “Winning is ending each day being a little better than you were that morning.” I discuss this idea further in my book, *From Chump to Champ – How Individuals Go from Good to Great.* (LINK)

With that definition in mind, I consistently did the work that resulted in beating my competition. It may be paradoxical, but for many athletes, focusing on beating the competition is not the best way to win. Setting personal goals and striving to beat one's personal best creates very positive daily training habits, and makes regular deposits in the self-confidence department.

“Lord, if you can't make me thin, at least make my friends look fat.”

This approach to life, always comparing ourselves to others, is a recipe for suffering and self-torment. It creates a focus on the outcome instead of the daily work required to be your best – whether it's in sports, school, or losing weight!

This approach also sets us up for a false sense of grandeur on those occasions when we win in spite of a sub-par performance and go home all puffed up. An athlete who beats his opponent, but knows he didn't perform well, can be pleased with the win – but not satisfied. An athlete who loses to an opponent, but did his very best, can choose to be satisfied with his performance – AND displeased with a loss. That means he is hungry to keep practicing.

This is why it's a better practice for young athletes to focus on beating their personal best rather than beating the competition - whether that's their teammates, the other team or anyone else who they see themselves “up against.”

It's important for coaches and parents to clarify one important performance truth for their athletes: Victories over any opponent are the result of the quality of their practices. Perfect practice – physical and mental -- creates performance excellence. What is delivered on the field, court, or pool in the heat of competition is always a reflection of what has been invested in practice.

“But I'm motivated by comparing myself to others.”

The best way to insure quality practice is to strive for measured improvement over one's best every day. However, once an athlete enters the arena, another variable kicks into gear that has more to do with one's nature and DNA – and that is “competitive spirit.”

According to the work of Marcus Buckingham in his book “Now, Discover Your Strengths”, some people are born with a natural need to compare themselves to others and use that comparison as the ultimate yardstick. To compete and win is the supreme challenge, and there’s no other feeling like it. Win at all costs is the extreme version of this mentality and can lead to less-than-ethical choices. To lose in competition may produce a polite smile afterwards, but inside this person is smoldering. It’s their nature, and to suggest they “shouldn’t be that way” is like telling the wind not to blow.

In these cases we must reinforce three concepts:

1. Beating your best in practice creates good work habits that lead to great performances
2. Competing fairly is expected and anything less than that will not be accepted
3. Losing means learning, so honor your opponent and honor yourself by figuring out what lesson is being taught by the loss

Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova were fierce competitors who had many epic battles on the tennis court. In spite of their strong competitive nature, they always admired and appreciated how they brought out the best in each other.

[CLICK HERE](#) to ask David Benzel a question about this topic:

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David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](#), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* www.growingchampionsforlife.com