

Winning is Great, but it's Not the Goal!

© Pam Richmond Champagne, MCC, *The Sports Parenting Coach*

Recently the parent of an aspiring athlete told me it seemed “almost un-American” to say winning is not the goal. In fact, many would say we compete in a “win-at-all-costs” environment. Is this helping or hurting our kids’ performances and lives? Naturally we all prefer to win, but this is a critical distinction: winning is a *byproduct* or a *consequence*, not a goal.

Paradoxically you increase your odds of winning when you place 100% attention, not on winning, but on the process – the learning and development, the continual movement toward mastery. During competition this means having a moment-to-moment, concentrated focus on executing skills and maintaining a positive attitude.

John Naber, a four-time Olympic gold medalist in swimming, exemplifies this vital concept. He shares, “My goal was never to win a race. My goal was to be the best I could be that day.” Disturbing news stories and studies show a focus on winning can produce un-sportsmanlike behavior, outright dishonesty, and unethical use of dangerous drugs.

Focusing on the outcome also decreases performance. It leads the performer away from the power of the present moment and creates performance-lowering tension by putting attention on something not under a player’s direct control.

I vividly recall one of my tennis matches that is a perfect illustration. In a close three-set final, I was just one game away from winning my match when all of my attention went to the outcome – winning the tournament. My strokes fell apart, I made a series of dumb errors, and the championship title slipped away.

As a parent you can help your child stay focused on the process. How? Be interested in what she’s learning about herself and what skills she’s developing. Find out what he enjoys about his sport. Most importantly, model this process orientation for your child. You certainly don’t have direct control over how well your athlete performs, but you do have control over how calm you are during and after your child’s performance, what you say, and how encouraging you are.

Next time you find yourself getting frustrated or annoyed at your child’s performance, ask yourself, what am I trying to control that I don’t have control over? Then zero in on what you do control. And remind yourself the winning focus is on the learning and the fun!

Pam’s Point: There’s a huge gap between loving to win and having to win, between competing to do our best and competing to be “the best.”