



Champion Coach Note: Virtue in Sport -- Perseverance



The Play Like a Champion Today® philosophy teaches that sports can and should be a virtuous activity. Our GROW model, which we have explored in the last month in these notes, connects the lessons athletes learn in sports to the four cardinal virtues: Fortitude (Goals), Justice (Relationships), Prudence (Ownership), and Temperance (Winning). Over the next weeks, we will explore some of the other virtues that sports teach us all as a reminder of what sports should be! Our first installment of these virtues will reflect on the virtue of Perseverance.

"The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning."

~ Ivy Baker Priest

Perseverance is something that, as adults, we can all appreciate. We have, no doubt, endured some sort of hard time in our life and come out scarred in some way, but also stronger as a result. Perhaps it has been a physical injury that has taken away some of our ability, a period of unemployment that has left us in despair, or a death of a loved one that has left us alone. Hard times are not something in which we delight, but as we grow older, the hard times of the past help us to keep trials in perspective, and make us grateful for what we have. As coaches and parents, we know that children don't have the benefit of age to help keep things in perspective. A break up with a cafeteria sweetheart or a bad grade on a geography test can seem like the end of the world. The trials our athletes face in sports can be a perfect metaphor for learning the value of hardship in life without having to endure tremendous amounts of actual pain. Our job as coaches and ministers to young people is to help teach them how hardships on

the field or in the gym can be forces for good in their young lives.

Success can come in bunches in talented athletes, but failure can come in equal portion without warning. It's nothing that can be explained, but it's just statistical. Dry spells come through no fault of the athlete, and they can often challenge a young person's self-worth and dedication. It's a coach's job to be there for an athlete, to encourage her to stay focused on the task at hand, and to empower him with the knowledge that dry spells will eventually give way. Alabama football coach Nick Saban perfects this by focusing on what he calls "the process." He is not so concerned with the result of a game, but on the execution and dedication his players put in.

Coaching kids can be complicated by the varying levels at which players grow. It's important to help athletes stay the course, and remain mastery-oriented to get through periods in which their growth prevents them from performing at the level of their peers. Injuries too can come as a dramatic change to a child's future plans, or at the very least how he or she enjoys his or her free time. Physical pain can be a tremendous weight to bear, and it's important for coaches to help keep athletes focused on the positive prospects for the future, rather than what an injury has taken away. Coaching athletes as people and not just as players is vital in helping them to understand their intrinsic value, and that they are not defined by their athleticism.

Perseverance is something almost any athlete can identify with, and it is a coach's job to make sure that hardships turn into lessons in endurance rather than the beginning of an end.