



## Champion Coach Note: Is Winning Everything?

Coaches, as we approach the end of the fall sports season with tournaments and championship games looming, it is important to think about the role of WINNING in sport.

When your team wins a game, how do you react?

When your team loses a game, how do you respond?

Reflecting on these questions can be very revealing. Winning is the end goal of all sport competition. Yet... As a Play Like A Champion coach, winning (the outcome of the game) should never be the central focus on your team. Rather, the focus should be on the broader picture of developing stronger athletes, well-rounded individuals and a team that represents the values of those who compose it. Success and winning are byproducts of hard work, teamwork, sacrifice and skill.

Ron O'Brien, the United State Olympic diving coach from 1972-1988 held that, "What keeps me going is not winning, but the quest for reaching potential in myself as a coach and my kids as divers. It's the pursuit of excellence." Becoming a champion at any level is simply not all about winning. It is about the attitude an athlete has and the work he or she puts in along the way. By allowing your athletes to have fun, while emphasizing the virtues of hard work, discipline, respect, compassion, integrity and faith as they play, their quest (and yours) will be for the pursuit of excellence which O'Brien explains.

The reality of sport is that winning AND losing are part of the game. There are lessons (and even goodness) in each outcome. Some specific points for



**"Winning isn't always Championships."**

~ Michael Jordan

### Athlete Reflection

Coaches help your athletes reflect upon the following questions to help your team focus on understanding what winning and losing really mean in sport and in life.

- How do I react when my team wins?  
When my team loses?
- If I wouldn't get caught, would I bend the rules (or even cheat) to win?
- What can I do to make myself better after my team loses?
- How do I define success? Is winning the best indication of success?

coaches to remember when it comes to helping athletes deal appropriately with wins AND losses:

- Praise athlete effort and hard work over performance or raw skill. Talent without dedication will eventually fail.
- Focus on appropriate goals. Coaches can focus on reachable goals for each athlete's ability and within every team's range. Always avoid comparing athletes or teams to each other.
- Recognize how you act as a coach when your team wins and when your team loses. You are modeling appropriate humility and proper perspective for your team.
- When a loss occurs, throw the ownership to your team and ask them, "What can we do differently in the next game to improve our performance and be more successful?"
- Pray in thanksgiving before and after practices and games for the ability to play helping to keep the whole sport process in the proper perspective.

Contrary to popular culture, Winning is NOT everything. By helping your athletes focus on the broader picture (not solely the scoreboard), they will grow not just as athletes but as quality people – learning to become Champions in the truest sense.

Check out our [Play Like A Champion Today BLOG](#). Notre Dame students discuss this topic further: "Winning at what cost?" and detail a specific situation in youth sport that challenges us to focus on the topic of WINNING from a character perspective. Coaches consider making this a topic for a team discussion on how far should we go to "WIN".