

# HANDLING FAILURES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

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One of the more important mental skills that you will need in your mental toughness toolbox if you want to go far as possible in this sport is a most unlikely one.

*The secret to your ultimate success in the pool lies in how you manage your failures and disappointments.*

Setbacks and failures will always be an expected part of your journey as a competitive swimmer. You can't go from "bad" to "great" without a lot of them.

## THE VERY BEST SWIMMERS IN THE WORLD "FAIL BETTER" THAN EVERYONE ELSE. WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN?

Each time you experience a bitter disappointment, fall far short of your goals in that all important taper meet or you lose again to your arch rival, whether you know it or not, you're at a critical mental crossroads in your swimming. Which road you choose after a failure will determine how much you improve as a swimmer and whether you reach your BIG dreams!

You can do what far too many swimmers do and get angry at yourself, use the failure as evidence of your shortcomings and then emotionally beat yourself up. Or, you can get curious about the meet and your races, carefully exploring what went wrong and therefore what you need to do differently next time.

## THE WRONG ROAD – GETTING LOST IN YOUR ANGER & FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY

You know the drill. After the meet you hear your "inner coach" tell you, "You suck! Your season was a total waste! You'll never get that cut! You don't have it anymore! You should just quit!" Unfortunately when you take this emotional road after failing, you'll completely miss the valuable information that always accompanies failure. In each and every failure we have, we are presented with an opportunity to learn what we did that didn't work, and therefore, exactly what we need to do differently next time in order to have a successful result. In this way, you will always find the seeds of future victories within your defeats and disappointments. However when you take this getting down on yourself road, getting furious with yourself for failing, then you'll be left directionless and discouraged, with little confidence and no motivation to keep on keeping on.

## THE RIGHT ROAD – GET CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT WENT WRONG

When you take the other road, when you temporarily set the anger and other strong emotions that accompany failure aside and get curious about what went wrong, then you put yourself into a completely different headset. Your confidence will remain high and your motivation to improve and get better will actually increase. Your curiosity as to what didn't work and what you could've done differently will send you in a constructive direction. This headset will insure that you quickly bounce back from your failures, continuously improve and stay on track towards your swimming goals.

## NO ONE LIKES FAILING

I've never met a serious athlete who didn't hate losing with a passion. However, the very best have figured out that what will hurt you in your swimming career is not the losses, disappointments or setbacks. These are to be expected and are quite necessary to reaching an elite level in anything that you do, in or out of the pool. The real problem here, and what will hurt you and seriously derail your swimming career is how you respond to these failures.

## GETTING UPSET WITH YOURSELF AFTER FAILING IS A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME

It has absolutely no constructive value. It won't motivate or inspire you to greater heights. It won't make you feel better about yourself, and it will do absolutely nothing to help you correct any mistakes you might have made that were responsible for your poor swims. Instead, learn to approach your disappointments and failures with curiosity. Get in the habit of asking yourself, "What did I do pre-race or during race that didn't work?" and "What do I need to do differently next time?" If you're not sure what you did wrong, then go ask your coach and he/she can help you learn exactly what you did wrong so you can constructively use your setbacks as building blocks to your ultimate success.

**REMEMBER: FAILURE IS FEEDBACK AND FEEDBACK IS THE BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS!**