

It does matter whether we win or loose.

In sports and in business, in fact in every facet of human existence it matters very much whether we win or loose. The key to happiness is in how we define winning. Winning is successfully making decisions that will positively affect the outcome of a challenge and then having the will to give your very best. In a swim meet attended by 1200 participants, with 80 swimmers in each event there can be only one winner in the traditional sense. However, there can be 80 winners if preparation is met with the will to find the limit of ability.

Preparation is all the things you do day in and day out, they can either bring you closer to winning or take you farther away from it. Getting to practice 20 minuets before it starts, eating right, getting 8 hours or more sleep every night, focusing on the details of a good turn, etc. are all examples of choices that will have a positive impact. The list is endless, and it is every participants charge to prepare himself and to hone skills to be the very best he can be on race day. That's the easy part; the part that we all know... honestly work hard and you will see results. But this alone will not make a competitor a winner. To be a winner one must have the will power to put everything he has on the line. To give every ounce of energy, then dig deeper to find more, again and again. But how do we help train the will to give a best effort?

Here is a hypothetical situation: "Your son is preparing for the Long Course Zone swim meet in August. It is to be the fastest meet he has ever attended. With the help of his coaches he has set a goal of placing in the top 3. You know what his ability realistically is. You know how tall he is and what genes he has. You also know how well he has prepared. You watched him wake up every morning to get to practice early, and then again you saw how dog tired he was when he got in the car to go home. You know he turned down his friends, when they asked him to go to the movies, because he wanted to get a good nights sleep. You know he packed a healthy lunch every day rather than eating some fast food prepared in a grease fryer. You also saw him do shoulder exercises every night. You watched him make choices that will positively affect the outcome.

He steps up and the gun sounds. He dives in and begins to race; his strokes are strong and much improved over the last time he raced. Repeatedly he is challenged by other swimmers and every time he seems to dig deeper and stay in the lead. He executes the turn perfectly; with a great streamline and he rockets off the wall. Down the home stretch a swimmer in the lane next to him puts in a strong finishing kick. It looks like the other swimmer will pass him half way down the pool, but he holds on. His stroke falters for a moment and he gasps for breath as another competitor moves up to challenge. But true to his preparation, he puts his head down and stays in the lead, getting his stroke back and fighting off the burn in his muscles and lungs. As the race enters the final 10 meters, it is going to be a close race, three... two... one strokes to go. The swimmer, in the lane over is going to time their stroke perfectly for the finish, but your swimmer drops an amazing final kick for the last 10 meters. And the winner is.....

Are you dying to know? Does it matter? Will you be more proud of him or happier for him if he touches the wall first? Most of all how can we develop the will power our hypothetical swimmer displayed numerous times when challenged during the race. What brought this spirit out of him? And what will he feel praised for at the end of the season, win or loose?

Let's say he did win. He hears the cheers from the crowd and he gets high fives from his friends and most of all a big hug from you. In November what will he remember? Keep in mind he is just a kid; most likely he will remember the big bear hug, the high fives and the medal sitting on his desk. But does that help develop the will power to repeatedly dig deeper and find a new level of excellence? What lesson will he take with him for the rest of his life? Beat every one else and you will receive praise? Or dedicated preparation and good decision making skills result in positive outcomes.

It is often hard to remember to do. And it is more rarely done enough. But the key is to let your swimmer know you appreciate all the good choices he or she makes on a daily basis. It is not enough, if at the end of the year they win the race or reach their goal. Remember they are just a kid and they have the memory befitting their age. Young athletes need to know that you are proud of them for doing the things other kids don't do. They need to know that you support them when they take on a new challenge. They don't want to hear about time standards, stroke corrections, or what you think they should do in a race. They want to hear what you think about them committing to something difficult, that you love them win or loose, and that you see value in what they do... Most of all they need to be reminded that you are 100% behind them every time they act in support of their goal.

A person can only find the will to give their very best if they know they have the support of the most important people in their lives, regardless of the outcome of their effort.

Regardless of the outcome, in order to give their very best effort, an athlete must know that they have the total support of the most important people in their lives.

Winning is found at the intersection of purposeful preparation and an honest best effort. Only when a person knows that the most important people in their lives are in support of them will they have the courage to dig deep into themselves and give their very best.