

Parents, Learning Experiences Suck!

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Jack Nicklaus once stated “*People don’t realize how often you have to come in second in order to finish first.*” This quote is illustrated by some statistics of future Hall of Fame golfers. Tom Lehman has had a long and distinguished career on the PGA Tour, but despite his longevity and victory in the 1996 British Open, he has (only) won five times on tour. The cumulative percentage of his victories per tournament is barely 1 percent. Kenny Perry has won thirteen PGA Tour events in over nineteen years, which accounts for about 2 percent overall. Arnold Palmer won sixty-two tournaments over his nineteen year PGA career for a winning percentage of 8 percent. For comparison, Tiger Woods’ PGA winning percentage is the highest at approximately 27 percent. These statistics show that even the best professionals in sport will lose more than they win. The lesson that we (as parents) can teach our children about the inherent difficulty of sport, and that in order to improve, we must learn from these setbacks and losses.

We all can learn an incredible amount from our setbacks, and oftentimes more that when we actually play well. Whenever we play well, we tend to focus on the success and the enjoyment that comes with succeeding. This belief is perpetuated often at the youth and high-school level when a youth team continues to win *all the time*. Since they are continually winning, they can easily become infected by their success and stop improving as a result. Winning is much more fun than losing and it is far easier to pat oneself on the back after winning than it is to look oneself in the mirror after a loss.

Unfortunately, we as parents can restrict development and growth by not allowing children to deal with setbacks and disappointment in their sport. This can occur when parents lobby coaches for playing time, withdraw them from tournaments, and/or not finish out seasons on less than stellar teams. It is also important to communicate with children about their experiences, because what may “bother” us may not even be an issue for the one playing.

When any of us plays poorly, doesn’t execute well, or even “chokes,” it is no fun at all. However, it is not necessarily supposed to be fun, and it may even hurt, but it is always teachable moment. Parents, these are the moments that we must use to instruct our children and players that it is ‘just a game,’ life does continue, and to learn from the experience.

We as parents should communicate with our children, prior to embarking in a sport, the importance of taking part and having fun. We might also consider explaining that in sport, setbacks can happen, and to learn from the setback, focus on improving, and most importantly keep having fun.

“That which hurts, instructs” - Benjamin Franklin

