

AASP LEARNING GUIDES HELP ADULTS TEACH CHILDREN LIFE LESSONS WHILE WATCHING THE 2012 SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES

Just in time for the Summer Olympic Games the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) is offering a series of interactive learning guides that adults can share with children while watching sports together. Sports provide an excellent opportunity to observe athletes in positive and negative situations, and with the assistance of the AASP Learning Guides, watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games and beyond can be a source for valuable life lessons.

When children watch a sporting event like swimming or gymnastics and see their favorite athletes at the height of their careers, there are important lessons to be learned, including the importance of good sporting behavior, cooperating within a team, handling disappointment, and learning to focus. A series of 10 guides for parents, caregivers and teachers can be found in the For Parents section of AASP's Resource Center at www.appliedsportpsych.org.

"AASP has developed a series of topics and questions that adults can discuss with children to develop a healthy dialogue when they watch sporting events on television or attend a local sports event or competition," explained Sean McCann, Ph.D., CC-AASP, Senior Sport Psychologist with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), Certified Consultant with and Past President of AASP. "Your child doesn't need to be an athlete to benefit from these discussions as children experience many of these issues in daily life."

The complimentary learning guides include:

- #1 Importance of Good Sporting Behavior
- #2 Cooperation vs. Competition within a Team
- #3 Defining Success (Winning and Losing)
- #4 Setting Goals in Sport and Life
- #5 What Sacrifices Do We Have to Make in Order to Do Great Things?
- #6 Preparing for Performance
- #7 Dealing with Nervousness
- #8 Learning to Focus
- #9 Dealing with Disappointment
- #10 Resilience: "Bouncing Back Quickly"

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Learning Guide #1 For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children **Importance of Good Sporting Behavior**

Watching the Olympic Games, or any sporting events, can be a valuable learning experience for young people. Just in time for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) has developed a series of learning guides for adults to share with children to promote healthy dialogue while watching sports on television or in person. This guide suggests certain observations and presents several questions to discuss together. The learning guide concludes with a brief summary of important facts regarding the topic.

Observation and discussion questions: Importance of Good Sporting Behavior

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- Pay attention to individual athletes and teams of athletes. In particular, watch for examples of positive sporting behavior.
- Do you see athletes shake hands before and after the competition? If you see them argue with opponents, they are engaging in poor sporting behavior.
- Do coaches shake hands before and after the competition?
- Watch how the athletes and coaches interact with each other. Do they treat each other respectfully?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you were a "good sport" to someone on an opposing team? How did you think that made them feel? How did it make you feel? To counter, if you've ever yelled at a teammate or disrespected a coach, you know that only fosters a negative atmosphere.
- Watch how teammates interact with each other. Do you see them giving only constructive criticism and positively encouraging each other? Why do you think this is important?
- Think about the rules of the sport you are watching. Positive sporting behavior is exemplified by following all of the rules. Do you see athletes and coaches doing this?

Lesson Conclusion

Research on athletes and coaches shows that appropriate sporting behavior can be developed in both game and practice situations. Positive sporting behavior is important at all levels of sport because it aids in character development. It is also important because it impacts many areas of sport such as team cohesion, respect among opponents, emotional control, and transferring values of sport into everyday life and non-sport activities. When we see examples of positive sport behavior (e.g. respectfully questioning officials, playing by the rules, congratulating your opponent, encouraging teammates), positive values are modeled and reinforced. It is important that young athletes learn what behaviors are acceptable and the impact of negative sporting behaviors, such as penalties and conflict with teammates.

What is critical in the discussion of positive sporting behavior is the idea that displaying positive behavior is a choice and a moral action. Once an athlete or coach recognizes the dilemma at hand, he or she has a choice to respond in an appropriate, positive manner. The more times we respond positively, the better examples we set for athletes of all ages.

AASP encourages adults to do their part to create a supportive youth sport environment so children will develop a lifelong interest in physical activity and sports. By teaching fundamental sporting principles, you can help children develop winning attitudes, both in sports and throughout life.

Prepared by AASP member Dr. Karen Collins, a professor in the Department of Kinesiology: Sport Studies at the University of New Hampshire in Durham. Dr. Collins serves as the chair of AASP's Community Outreach Committee.

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Learning Guide #2

For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children **Cooperation vs. Competition within a Team**

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Observation and discussion questions: Cooperation vs. Competition within a Team

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- What are some of the differences noted watching team sports versus individual athletic venues (i.e. track/field).
- Do you think athletes cooperate with teammates or might they be very competitive toward one another?
- If the latter occurs, how might intra-squad competition affect a team's overall performance and morale?
- How important is it for teammates to support one another? What are ways to show teammates you are cooperative?
- Do you play team sports? If so, which one. Have you ever played on a team where players were very competitive with one another? Do you think that enhanced or negatively impacted your team's cohesion?

Lesson Conclusion

Learning to play a team sport enables young athletes to develop trust, respect, and reliance on one another. Even individual sports have elements of team sports because they require the assistance of another for practice, input, and to gauge improvement.

In youth sports, youngsters are taught the importance of cooperation as it helps build the bonds of trust and support with one's teammates. Team practices provide opportunities to learn each other's strengths and weaknesses with the understanding the goal is to work together in order to defeat one's opponents. At the same time, youngsters may develop personal goals to motivate them to do their very best. Developing a performance goal allows competitive strivings to be directed toward personal improvement rather than against fellow players. However, if a youngster's competitive desire is only to win or be regarded as the best player, this attitude could interfere with the importance of working cooperatively and be a well-rounded team player.

A supportive team atmosphere needs to allow for intra-squad competition during practices. Yet, adults must provide guidance so young athletes find the balance between working together vs. working against the team, otherwise it will interfere with team chemistry and cohesion. When a team exhibits cooperation, players feel positive about their roles and in turn this enhances team morale.

Even at the elite, Olympic level, cooperation will be at the forefront of the most successful teams. This will be witnessed by their being able to collectively use their superb athletic talents and channel their fiercely competitive drive against their opponents and rivals. During the Olympics, you will see America's teams work together for the same coveted goal; which will be to do their best to win an Olympic medal for their country.

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Prepared by AASP member Dr. Andrea Corn, a licensed psychologist who works in private practice in Lighthouse Point, FL.

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Learning Guide #3 For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children **Defining Success (Winning and Losing)**

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Observation and discussion questions: Defining Success (Winning and Losing)

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- Do you think an Olympic athlete is successful only if he or she wins a medal?
- Can you think of other ways an athlete could say his or her performance was successful in the 2012 Olympics?
- If an Olympic athlete played very well, but the entire team did not perform well enough to receive a medal, could that athlete still view his or her performance as successful?
- Imagine you've just become an Olympic athlete. What would matter most to you? Winning a gold, silver, or bronze medal? Representing your country? Or, trying your hardest and playing your best?
- In your youth sports games, what happens if your team defeats an opponent, but you did not play well? What happens if your team loses an important game, but your performance was outstanding? How might you define the outcome of these two situations?
- Are you able to see that winning can be defined in ways beyond the final score?
- What have you learned about yourself following an individual or team loss?

Lesson Conclusion

In sports competition, every athlete will experience the joy of winning as well as the disappointment of losing. At the Olympic level, the competition is fierce and the pressure to win intense. During each Olympics, the best (amateur) athletes around the world gather to compete against one another in various sporting events. Winning a medal is extraordinarily special and highly revered. The different medals announce to the world which athletes are 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in a particular category at a specific moment in time. And, yet, there are no guarantees as to who will win. Even a highly well regarded athlete can struggle and not perform up to his or her desired potential. Once the summer Olympic game begins, all the exciting wins and heart-breaking losses will be documented on TV.

Children enter youth sports in order to have fun, to be with friends and to learn new skills. Initially, the focus is on trying one's best, and should not be on winning, as this detracts from the overall enjoyment of playing. One of the most important life lessons children can gain by playing sports is learning how to be a gracious winner as well as a courteous loser. After all, both will happen to everyone and one's self-worth will not be defined by the game's outcome. In fact, becoming a serious, world-class athlete requires years of practice, dedication; and equally accepting victory and defeat, injuries and set-backs, forward progress and stagnation, as any and all will occur as part of the athlete's journey.

As youngsters grow and improve in their athletic abilities, success can be defined in additional ways, such as creating and setting specific performance goals. As one's personal goals are achieved, it can lead to increased intrinsic motivation, which inspires and fortifies self-discipline, perseverance, and pride. And, as competition evolves and intensifies in youth sports, youngsters can take delight in being recognized for their athletic accomplishments by receiving external, verbal, and/or non-verbal rewards. These rewards occur by receiving trophies, praise, and even high fives for one's team and/or personal efforts.

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Learning Guide #4
For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children
Setting Goals in Sport and Life

Watching the Olympic Games, or any sporting events, can be a valuable learning experience for young people. Just in time for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) has developed a series of learning guides for adults to share with children to promote healthy dialogue while watching sports on television or in person. This guide suggests certain observations and presents several questions to discuss together. The learning guide concludes with a brief summary of important facts regarding the topic.

Observation and discussion questions: Setting Goals in Sport and Life

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- Do you think the Olympic athletes set goals that helped them get there?
- What goals do you think they set?
- Do you think the athletes just had one goal to get to the Olympic Games? Or do you think they had many smaller goals that eventually got them to the Olympic Games?
- Have you ever set goals in sports, school or other performance areas?
- Have you ever set a goal and not reached it? Did that make you feel like giving up or did you become more determined? What can you do to change a goal to make it more achievable?
- Do you believe the Olympic athletes achieved every single goal that they ever set?

TIPS FOR SETTING GOALS:

- Set specific goals.
- Set realistic, but challenging goals. Aim high, yet be reasonable.
- Set short-term and long-term goals: Write a goal that is your ultimate goal. Short-term goals should focus on developing specific skills needed to achieve the long-term goal. Create goals to reach your ultimate goal.
- Set goals for practice AND competition (not just competition).
- Write your goals down. “Ink it, don’t just think it.”
- Develop goal achievement strategies: Think about how you will develop the skills to meet your goal.
- Set goals that are measurable.
- Set individual and, if appropriate, team goals.
- Periodically evaluate where you are and decide if you need to change your practice routines to reach the set goals, or if you need to change the goals themselves to make them more realistic.
- Realize that improvement and success is an ongoing and exciting process, and the “journey” can be as satisfying as the “destination”.

Lesson Conclusion

Research on athletes and in business psychology clearly indicates that people who set goals, and then periodically evaluate their goals, are more successful than people who do not set goals. Athletes usually set long-term goals, but they often don’t set daily practice goals that will lead them to their ultimate goals. When children set goals that are achievable and then begin to see themselves reaching these goals, they will increase their confidence and self-esteem. Being more confident then brings about more success. Unrealistic goal setting can create a sense of hopelessness and failure. Athletes do best when they aim high, but focus on their short-term goals. Parents can help young athletes be realistic by helping their daughters and sons develop sensible short-term daily, weekly or monthly goals.

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Prepared by AASP member Dr. Mark A. Hogue, a clinical and sport psychologist in private practice in Erie, PA at Northshore Psychological Associates.

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Learning Guide #5

For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children **What Sacrifices Do We Have To Make In Order To Do Great Things?**

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Observation and discussion questions: What Sacrifices Do We Have To Make In Order To Do Great Things?

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- What sacrifices do you think these athletes have made to get to the Olympic Games?
- Have you ever had to make a choice between playing your sport and doing something else that would be fun? How did you decide?
- Can you think of other people in these athletes' lives who have made sacrifices to help them get there?
- What have the athletes and their families given up?
- Do you think they are comfortable with the sacrifices they have made?
- Have you ever had to make a sacrifice for something you do that's important to you? At school? In music? For your team?
- What did that feel like to you? How did you deal with it?
- Can you think of a sacrifice your family has made for you that has helped you achieve something you wanted?

Lesson Conclusion

Successful athletes realize that sacrifice is part of competitive sports. Young athletes give up alternative activities to excel in one particular area. Often educational experiences are modified and social experiences are limited to their sport and coaching relationships. Parents and families of athletes make many sacrifices as well: carpooling, washing uniforms, preparing two dinners — one for a child involved in sport and one for the rest of the family — as well as attending practices, games and competition. There are also financial sacrifices families make to support the travel and training expenses of talented athletes. Most sport psychology consultants agree that the key to whether a sport experience has been worthwhile is whether the athlete has had the opportunity to grow and develop as a person.

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Prepared by AASP member Sharon A. Chirban, Ph.D., CC-AASP, who is in private practice in Boston and Concord, MA.

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Learning Guide #6

For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children

Preparing for Performance

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Observation and discussion questions: Preparing for Performance

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- Observe athletes immediately prior to performing their events.
- What do these athletes do immediately before competition?
- Do some athletes appear to have a routine (structured sequence of behaviors and thoughts) that they go through?
- What do you think the athlete is thinking about right now before he or she performs?
- Are there any differences between the athletes that use routines and the athletes who do not? For example, does either athlete look more relaxed, confident, happy or panicked, rushed, confused or worried?
- What do you do immediately before performing a skill?
- How might being at the Olympic Games (or playing an important game) change your thoughts and behaviors immediately before performing a skill? Might this change affect your performance? How can you remain steady and focused before a big game?
- How might using a routine help you to stay focused, relaxed and confident going into your performance?

Lesson Conclusion

Successful athletes are appropriately energized, confident and focused immediately prior to performing. Rather than allowing their surroundings, such as being at the Olympic Games, affect how they prepare, successful athletes go through the same behaviors and think the same thoughts during the five minutes before every performance. Athletes may physically walk through their performances or some aspect of their performance. For example, they may visualize executing their performances flawlessly (especially watch gymnasts who move their arms and body as they would if they were standing on flat ground).

Some athletes will talk to themselves, saying things to stay confident or say cue words (explode, smooth and strong) that guide them through specific movements. The last five minutes prior to performing a skill can be critical for athletes in focusing their emotions and energy. Some athletes use this time to make sure they are psyched up and ready to explode while others use this time to calm themselves down. Importantly, successful athletes use this time productively to put themselves in a mindset that helps their performance.

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Prepared by AASP member Dr. Jonathan Metzler, CC-AASP, Sport Psychology Consultant for USA Wheelchair Rugby. Dr. Metzler is working with this national team in preparation for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

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Learning Guide #7
For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children
Dealing with Nervousness

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Observation and discussion questions: Dealing with Nervousness

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- See if you can identify several athletes who seem to be nervous.
- How can you tell that they are nervous?
- What do you think they are thinking and feeling?
- Do you think that this helps them perform well or does it get in the way?
- Have you ever felt nervous before performing in a sporting event, acting in a play or taking a test in school?
- How do Olympic athletes deal with nervousness?
- How do you deal with it?
- Would it be helpful to learn how to control your nerves (not become nervous) better?

Lesson Conclusion

Being nervous is common before a game or event when the outcome is really important to you. For many athletes, being a little nervous is a sign of being excited, which can be a good thing. It can motivate and energize you, and even help you pay attention. For most athletes, being a little nervous is a normal feeling before competing. However, being too nervous can get in the way of a good performance. This is sometimes called "stage fright" or "choking". Olympic athletes practice many different ways to control their nerves. Some will think about, or visualize, playing well. Others may take a deep breath just before starting. Sport psychology consultants can teach athletes and other performers how to relax under such pressure.

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Prepared by AASP President Jack J. Lesyk, Ph.D., CC-AASP, director of the Ohio Center for Sport Psychology.

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Learning Guide #8

For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children

Learning to Focus

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Observation and discussion questions: Learning to Focus

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- While watching a specific event, describe what you think an athlete is “paying attention to” or “focusing on.”
- Some people think they can tell if an athlete is focused by looking at his or her face. Do you think you can tell?
- Have you noticed that the more you work at something and the better you get at it, the better you can focus?
- Have you noticed that it is easier to focus on things you like to do? Have you noticed what happens to your ability to focus when you get tired or things go wrong?
- Even the greatest athletes lose focus sometimes. As you watch the Olympic Games, see if you notice when athletes lose focus. Try to figure out why.
- Feeling pressure to perform well causes some athletes to lose focus? How about worrying? What kinds of things might an athlete worry about? What are the kinds of things you worry about?
- There is also refocusing. This means getting your mind back on track after you get distracted. Watch for athletes who seem to lose their focus but then successfully refocus and perform well. Can you think of a time this has happened to you?

Lesson Conclusion

Successful athletes strive to pay full attention in practice and in games. They also can refocus quickly if they get distracted. All athletes can learn to do this with practice. The more you do it, the better you do it. Also, the more you believe in yourself, the easier it is to focus. Worry is the most common enemy of focus. It usually starts out as an attempt to solve a problem, but worry can quickly become a problem in itself. It is like thinking in a circle. Worrying is having the same negative thoughts again and again. Everybody worries to some degree. When it happens — tell yourself STOP! Then, take a deep breath and think about your sport. Think about what you do well. Think about how much fun it can be.

As a competitive athlete, you may feel pressure to perform well. Sometimes we want to do well for our teammates, coaches and parents. Try not to think about that. STOP! Instead, think about what you do well. This will help you stay excited about competing and will help you focus on the task at hand. Sometimes it helps to make a list of things that can cause you to lose focus. Then make a second list of ways to avoid being distracted or that can help you refocus. Elite athletes have very specific plans for coping with distractions, which allow them to stay focused and perform well. Always remember, the more fun you have, the better you focus - the better you focus, the more fun you have!

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Prepared by AASP member John Heil, Ph.D., CC-AASP, a partner in Psychological Health Roanoke. Dr. Heil has served as a sport psychology consultant for USA Fencing since 1995.

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Learning Guide #9

For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children

Dealing with Disappointment

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Observation and discussion questions: Dealing with Disappointment

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- Find an athlete who might be disappointed with how they performed in the Olympic Games.
- What did they say or do to let you know they were disappointed?
- What did you like or not like about how they showed their disappointment?
- Have you ever been disappointed in your own performance? In sport? Music? School?
- What did that feel like to you, and how did you get over it?
- Often, athletes want to win every competition in which they participate. Is it realistic to expect to win every time? Would you have fun if you knew that you would “magically win” every time, even if you didn’t try?
- What if you lost to someone and you performed very well, but they performed better that day? Can you still feel good about how you played, even if you are disappointed?
- Do you feel like you have to perform PERFECTLY every time you compete? Is it possible to be perfect? Do you think you need to be perfect to be good at something?
- How might you feel if you do not perform perfectly?
- Do you get angry at yourself when you make a mistake? Why? What can you do instead of being mad?

Lesson Conclusion

Successful athletes realize disappointment is part of sport. If they won every competition, they would eventually become bored with their sport and quit. The only way to win every competition would be to compete against others who were not as good. Sometimes athletes perform well, but their opponent might seem to have an edge that day, and beat them. It is easy to be gracious when you win, but it is more difficult to accept defeat. Good sports will always tell their opponent “good game.”

Successful athletes pursue excellence, not perfection. While they want to win, they realize they won’t always win. They learn to evaluate how well they played, win or lose. For example, watch an athlete who has a personal best at the Olympic Games, but may get a Bronze Medal. She or He may still be very excited, yet disappointed that they did not get a Gold Medal. These athletes respect their sport, the other participants and those around them. When they are disappointed, they do not allow that emotion to ruin their experience, or other participants’ sport experience. They learn to cope with adversity and loss, as well as with success. Successful athletes use disappointment to motivate them to practice so they do better in the future.

AASP encourages adults to do their part to create a supportive youth sport environment so children will develop a lifelong interest in physical activity and sports. By teaching fundamental sporting principles, you can help children develop winning attitudes, both in sports and throughout life.

Prepared by AASP member Dr. Mark A. Hogue, a clinical and sport psychologist in private practice in Erie, PA at Northshore Psychological Associates.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,500 members in 39 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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Learning Guide #10

For Watching the 2012 Summer Olympic Games/Sporting Events with Children

Resilience: “Bouncing Back Quickly”

Watching the Olympic Games, or any sporting events, can be a valuable learning experience for young people. Just in time for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) has developed a series of learning guides for adults to share with children to promote healthy dialogue while watching sports on television or in person. This guide suggests certain observations and presents several questions to discuss together. The learning guide concludes with a brief summary of important facts regarding the topic.

Observation and discussion questions: Resilience: “Bouncing Back Quickly”

While you watch the 2012 Summer Olympic Games or other sporting events:

- Find a few examples of athletes in individual sports that made mistakes during their performances.
- How did these athletes respond after making these mistakes? How did they perform just after the mistake and/or in later trials or events?
- Think of a time when you made a mistake. How did you feel? How long did the feeling last? How did that feeling affect you when you tried again?
- Watch a team sport like soccer (or, in winter, hockey) and identify a point in the game where an obvious rule violation is not called. Focus on those players who are visibly upset about the official’s mistake. How do their reactions affect their performances? Are they able to let it go and get back to focusing on the game?
- While watching a team game, or team effort, notice a team that is behind. How can they “bounce back?” When a team or player bounces back, THAT is called resilience.
- How do you feel when someone treats you unfairly and gets away with it? What happens to your concentration?
- When you make a mistake or something doesn’t go your way, how quickly do refocus on what you were doing?
- Does refocusing help your performance?
- While performing, does focusing on your mistake or the mistakes of others help you perform better? If so, how?
- If something goes wrong in your performance, what are some ways you can quickly bounce back and perform your best?

Lesson conclusion

Successful athletes understand that things happen during competitions that are unplanned. The best response is to ignore them or quickly refocus on the game and move forward. Sometimes athletes themselves make mistakes. Other times, the environment (weather or equipment), a competitor, or even an official can knock an athlete off track. Successful athletes do not dwell on these mistakes or mishaps. They quickly refocus on the present and what they need to do next.

It is natural to experience immediate negative emotions when something goes wrong; however, resilient athletes do not allow these emotions to linger. Athletes who are not resilient waste valuable energy and focus on things other than the skills they are doing. These athletes often perform poorly. In contrast, resilient athletes limit the effect of adversity on later performances, allowing them to return to performing well. Successful athletes may experience disappointment, anger or frustration associated with adversity, but rather than being overcome by these emotions they find ways to quickly bounce back.

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