

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

When Life Isn't Fair, What Should We Teach Our Athletes?

By David Benzel



Have you ever heard your athlete say something like this?

- I wasn't chosen for the varsity team, but she was. It's not fair.
- The Ref called me out as I slid into 2nd base. He wasn't close enough to see. It's not fair.
- The judge said I didn't stick my landing well. He doesn't like me. It's not fair.

As a parent, you may struggle with how to handle these kinds of reactions.

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In fact, what IS the best way to respond – whether or not your child is correct in their assessment of the situation? Injustice is definitely in the eyes of the beholder because perspective is usually very subjective.

But the truth is, life is NOT always fair.

And when we believe that life is fair, or that it should be, our expectations war against the reality.

[Research](#) shows that as early as 12 months of age, children have a fundamental sense of fairness. So, when the inevitable happens how can we equip our kids to handle it like star athletes?

Here are a few things to consider.

Don't Get Caught In the Comparison Trap

Comparison can take your athlete from contentment to feeling slighted quicker than just about anything. And from an incredibly early age, we all start noticing when someone gets “better” or “more” than we do.

When you compare your situation with someone else's, feelings can quickly derail. The path might look like this:

Compare → Notice an inequity → Feel cheated → Begin whining → Harbor resentment

No part of this path is helpful. And very little growth, if any, can happen when your athlete gets stuck here.

To develop a mindset – in your athlete – that doesn't filter everything through comparisons, try these tips:

- Model it. Your child learns how to cope by watching you. Check yourself and make sure you are not playing the comparison game with YOUR friends, co-workers, and neighbors.
- Gently remind your athlete that the world, and team, does not revolve around just him. Encourage him to see things through the eyes of others.

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- Regularly ask your child these questions. What would it sound like if you congratulated your teammate, even though you may feel envious? What would it look like if you didn't compare your efforts and opportunities to everyone else on the team?

Recognize That Life Is a Journey and Is Always Changing

We all experience seasons in life – and not just the sports kind.

There will be times when:

- Everything seems easy
- Challenges are all around
- Growth is happening
- We feel stuck
- We are discouraged
- We are hopeful

Regardless of what our kids are experiencing, it is essential for them to know that everything changes.

Teach them to find contentment in the moment and empower them to live above what seems fair or unfair.



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Try any one of these strategies to help your athlete find the “good” in the current moment:

- Journal 3 things every night that they are thankful for
- At family dinner, have everyone share a “High” for the day
- As a family, celebrate once a month the successes each person experienced

Always Give Your Best

Sometimes when your athlete is struggling with the accolades or opportunities that others are getting it is because deep down she knows she didn't give it her best effort.

Claiming that something is “not fair” may help to distract from the real issue – she was not as deserving as her teammate – but it is a temporary fix.

Encourage your athlete to give their best effort ALWAYS, because hard work and perseverance do pay off.

Communicate regularly to your athlete that:

- You value their effort and good attitude as much, if not more than the results
- Progress happens little by little when they choose to work hard daily
- Help your athlete to notice the signs of hard work in their teammates – encourage them to applaud them when appropriate

At the End of the Day...

Oscar Wilde, a famous London playwright from the late 1800's, seemed to have a good understanding of fairness. He said,

“Life is never fair, and perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.”

This is a good reminder that so often we DO get more than we deserve.

Help your athletes see the world through THIS lens and give them a significant advantage in sports and life.

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David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* www.growingchampionsforlife.com