



Katie Ledecky: Making Every Practice Count

Watching the superstars in any sport might leave you with the impression that performing at that level is easy for them. It would be natural to think that even their practice sessions are made up of nothing but stellar moments.

However, when you look “behind the curtain” you’ll find a very different picture. The truth is that they have lots of days that are challenging, disappointing, and even frustrating. But the great ones handle those moments differently than the average athlete.

Swimmer Katie Ledecky, a Five-time Olympic gold medalist, recently shared some insights on what works for her when things aren’t going well in practice.

Katie approaches every day with the mindset that if you want to improve, you have to be willing to accept failure along the way. Her coach, Bruce Gemmel, says, “There are days Katie fails catastrophically.” In fact, in her training group, Katie fails more than anyone. But she understands that improving includes pushing her limits every time she walks on the pool deck, even though it might mean having some humbling moments.

She ignores the perfectionist in her, and faces her failures, rather than trying to pretend she’s the best every single day.

There are days when Katie admits she’s just not feeling it, but her work ethic doesn’t change. One of her pearls of wisdom is that there’s no such thing as a wasted practice. If one part of practice isn’t clicking for her on a given day, Katie focuses on something that she CAN improve. If her pacing is off—then she’ll focus on stroke technique and try to make it perfect. Or she’ll think about her streamline off the wall, or whether her flip-turns are tight.

Katie believes that if you give up on a practice just because you are feeling sluggish, then you have missed an opportunity that you’ll never get back. So here’s a good question: Is Katie really SUPER human, or does she just work SUPER hard? She says, “I try to make the good days great, and take something positive from the days I’m not feeling so good.”

Now, let’s put Katie’s approach into perspective. When we see those glorious moments of an Olympic victory, touching the wall first, and standing on the podium, remember -- there are thousands of hours, days, months and years of training that have been put into that ONE moment. It’s a reminder that gives every aspiring athlete a reason to put in the hard effort, every day. Especially on the days when things aren’t going so well.





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Discussion Guide for Parent and Athlete

1

What kind of challenges does your athlete face in practices that might throw him/her off their plan?

2

Ask your athlete to make a list of alternative points of focus for those times when something isn't going well.