



# Megan Fairchild: 3 Lessons from a Ballerina

Anyone who has achieved “greatness” at anything knows that a lot of sacrifice and time goes into reaching the elite level. Megan Fairchild is a principal dancer with the New York City Ballet and a world-renowned ballerina. She’s very familiar with the pressures of becoming the best.

Her dance journey started at the young age of 4. In less than 2 short years she went from being a member in the corps, to a soloist, to a principal dancer, at the young age of 20—a super-fast timeline that most dancers only dream of.

But with that honor came an incredible amount of stress. Suddenly, she was thrust into the most difficult roles, and had to quickly LEARN how to handle the pressure. Let’s see what lessons we can learn from a world-class ballerina.

Okay, so your athlete is not wearing a tutu and listening to classical music, but the methods that Megan Fairchild uses to deal with the day-to-day weight of her role can be used to help your child develop in his own sport. Here are 3 techniques used regularly by one of America’s most celebrated ballerinas.

## **1) Break the Journey Down Into Daily Bites**

Highly-motivated athletes think about their long-term goals, but getting consumed by the BIG dream can also leave an athlete paralyzed.

Megan found this to be true as well, and so she began to just focus on her daily tasks. If she could just tackle and accomplish the 1 thing she needed to get done on a particular day, she found that she enjoyed it a lot more. It helped if she put all her attention on the class she was currently taking, rather than dwelling on her goal to become a principal dancer.

Here’s the Take-Away: Every athlete can benefit from the baby-step approach. Help your athlete breakdown skill-development into small, DAILY bites.

## **2) Stay Present In the Moment, Without Self Judgment**

Perfectionism may drive an athlete to work harder, but it can also be a crippling handicap—robbing a young athlete of the joy of competing and learning new things. Megan struggles with this tendency but admits that one of her most significant lessons learned is that you can NOT always be perfect. She has found meditation to be helpful. She’s learned to be more present, in the moment, and not get caught up in the negative thoughts or judgments.

Here’s the Take-Away: Help your athlete find what works for her. She may benefit from playing music before a competition to get in the “zone.” Or maybe meditating on some key phrases like, “fast-feet” or “gliding effortlessly” or “strong core”—these might help to keep the negative thoughts from taking over. Encourage her to refrain from any self judgment during competition. There’s always a bigger picture to look at.

## **3) Be Open to Taking a Break**

Our bodies are designed to handle stress pretty well—in the short term. But when stress is ongoing and without any release, it sabotages our ability to recover physically and mentally. This is why “breaks” are so critical to long-term success. Megan openly admits that the best decision she ever made was to take a break from the ballet company and do a Broadway show. Stepping out of her comfort zone, allowed her to be stretched in ways that she had never experienced in ballet. It also refreshed her mind, allowed her to discover new things she enjoyed, and opened up opportunities.

Here’s the Take-Away: Breaks can consist of either straight rest or active rest. It might mean taking 2-weeks away from all forms of working out, Or it could mean participating in a completely different sport for a season -- just to learn something new and enjoy being physical in a totally different way. Either way, it might allow your athlete to come back stronger than ever.





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## Discussion Guide for Parent and Athlete

1

Which of Megan's lessons does your child currently use?

2

Which of Megan's lessons would be most beneficial for your athlete right now?