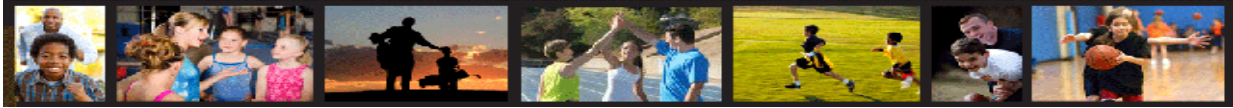


David Benzel's

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE



Winners Connection

Conquering the Fear of Failure

by David Benzel

I was recently asked by a coach, "How can we help young athletes get past the fear of failure?" The question can be answered on several levels and I'll use a swimming pool metaphor to expose the depth of this common question.



On the shallow end of the pool, I benefitted from something I was told in the early days of my competitive career: "Turn your fear into aggression." Energy is energy, so why not use nervous or fearful energy and convert it into aggressiveness? Learning to control that aggression and using it wisely is the next step.

Most fears come from a silent question like, "What if I strike out?" or "What if I choke?" The athlete who hears that thought and quickly responds with, "So, what am I going to do about it?" immediately puts his mind to work finding a solution that prevents it from happening! It's a proactive approach that gives control back to the athlete.

The middle depths of the pool provide a more meaningful answer. Here's the question: "What is the purpose of your efforts in this game and in this sport?" If the purpose is **to win** (victory, trophy, championships) then you are always at risk of losing. The fear of losing can cripple your efforts. However if your purpose is **to learn** (new lessons, new strategies, new techniques) then you are guaranteed success in every practice and at every game. There are no failures, there are only lessons. When you focus on the lessons learned not only will you learn more, you'll also win more! It's simply a matter of focusing on what creates wins, rather than focusing on wins.

At the deepest end of the pool is a more fundamental insight. Again it requires another question: Does the outcome of any effort - win or lose, success or failure - define someone? "Am I the mistakes I make?" "Is any one performance a verdict, or judgment about who I am, or my worth?" The answer to all of these questions is "NO!"

The outcome of any effort is only feedback; it is not **who you are**. Fear of failure is, at the deepest level, a fear that a performance is a judgment about personal worth, and that's a fallacy that must be conquered. True value as a person and as an athlete comes from an inherent worthiness that was placed in you at birth and does not depend upon today's performance for validation.

Fear always comes from negative thoughts in an athlete's head. When an athlete chooses in his heart to believe in himself, fear is edged out and finds no place to dwell.