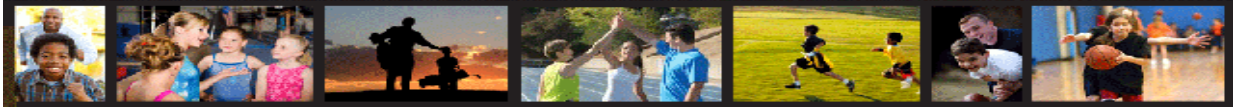


David Benzel's

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE



Winners Connection

The Importance of Small Wins by David Benzel



One of the principles that made the biggest difference to me during my early years of water ski competition came when I redefined "winning" to mean something other than a trophy. "Winning is ending the day being just a little better than you were that morning." That concept turned out to be the key to setting me free from a loser's mentality, since I didn't have any trophies at the time! This new definition helped me focus on making progress on a daily basis, even if it was small incremental steps.

What appear to be major athletic breakthroughs are normally the sum total of many small daily wins accumulated over time. Research described in Harvard professor Teresa Amabile's book, "*The Progress Principle*" verifies that "of all the events that have the power to excite people and engage them in their work, the single most important is making progress – even if that progress is a small win." **This means that one of the secrets to keeping children engaged and motivated about practicing is to facilitate their progress.**

This isn't to say that things like having fun, receiving recognition, socializing with friends, and even winning doesn't provide inspiration for today's athlete. However, there is a natural yearning in all of us that is satisfied when we learn something, or make progress toward a goal. Perhaps this is an element that some coaches *hope* will happen, but do not purposefully pursue during practice as a priority.

In fact, some coaches believe that keeping athletes under stress during practice is the primary goal. Amabile's research establishes that having to solve a challenge is good, but "it's a dangerous fallacy to say that people perform better when they're stressed, over-extended, or unhappy." People in general perform better when they're in a good mood. Why wouldn't that be true of kids in youth sports?

While tall trophies look nice on the mantel, making daily progress on skills or game strategy has far greater benefit in the long run, and will keep your child fueled to keep working on the days when the sun isn't shining on the scoreboard.