

Feel Good Moments

By Chuck Schumacher

“My son, Zach has worked eight years to become an acclaimed athlete at his middle school and now can’t reap any of the privileges. He says it doesn’t matter, but it stinks for all the eighth-graders – it’s not fair”.

“My daughter, Kelsey just lost her senior year in volleyball after years of dedication to the sport she loves. It’s unbearable to think that she won’t get to finish what she started so many years ago – it’s just not fair”.

These are not isolated stories – they are world-wide stories. Pretty much everyone on the planet has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. But many are dealing with a lot more than those of us who are missing out on the feel-good moments in sports. If we take a moment and bring this into context, we will realize that we haven’t really lost anything.



Our development as an athlete is a continuous journey with many hills and valleys – much like life. If we do the hard work, it leads to external rewards along the way. Making the varsity squad in middle school; getting special accolades as a senior; receiving a black belt in karate or winning the Little League World Series are all examples of external rewards and they feel good. But in the larger scope of things as it applies to a lifelong journey of self-improvement, placing too much emphasis on these brief moments can hinder our development, affect our happiness, or even sidetrack us completely. We can lose our way.

When something doesn't go as expected, what language are we going to use when talking to our kids about so-called "unfairness?" Are we going to lay blame on some outside force, or will we help our kids experience growth by teaching them to look within themselves where the real answers are? During a pandemic, just staying healthy becomes a challenge. "Without your health, you have nothing" couldn't ring truer. But instead of being bored because there's nothing to do or dwelling on what we're missing out on, why don't we use these challenging times to show our kids how to navigate obstacles to our greater good?

When life is rolling along without a hitch, it's easy to start feeling entitled, especially when something is taken away – or we don't get our way.

Our personal good effort in life is what leads to sustainable success; it's something we have complete control over. But even if we work our tail off it doesn't mean we are entitled to anything because the truth is, when it comes to excellence, hard work is expected. We are entitled, however, to feel good about ourselves because we have put in the work through thick and thin. With this approach, confidence grows and opportunities lie ahead.

While it is disappointing that there are no sports for a while and many other pleasures have disappeared, let this be a time for reflection and self-discovery, not one of blame and denial. Become skilled at seeing the big picture instead of the small window of opportunity you think you missed. Let's learn how to use disadvantage... to our advantage by refusing to give in and dig deep to find a stronger, more disciplined and caring version of ourselves.

In youth sports, it's very easy to lose perspective and focus only on the external rewards. But when we fail to see the bigger picture, we sabotage the very purpose of youth sports: *character and physical development*. By adhering to a model of self-improvement as a whole person – not just as an athlete, our kids will reap the internal rewards which they will carry with them throughout life. They will learn to see the feel-good moments along the way for what they truly are: not an end result, but rewards for their continuing effort on a journey toward self-discovery.