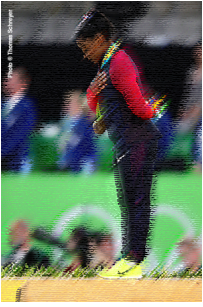


Written by dwight normile
Thursday, 07 June 2018 07:10



Now that changes are on their way to end abuse — sexual, physical, verbal, emotional — it is also high time to realign priorities. A good start would be to ditch the medals-first mentality.

A good friend of mine recently said that kids should be polished, not ground. He's right. No medal is worth a gymnast's happiness.

By the very nature of gymnastics, a sport that strives for perfection, coaches constantly tell a gymnast what he/she is doing wrong. Whether it's warming up at a meet or working out at the gym, the inevitable string of corrections can be discouraging for any gymnast.

Coaches have a tough job, for sure. They need to treat every gymnast differently based on personality, skill level, home life and other circumstances.

There is little time for "The Sandwich Method," where a coach starts and ends with a positive comment and inserts the critique in the middle. Especially if you're in a hurry and coaching several gymnasts.

Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. Experienced coaches have learned the value of praise. But young coaches might not understand the psychology of training young gymnasts.

Elites are generally over-trained. Spending more than 30 hours in the gym each week leads to chronic injuries or worse. It would be wise if all elites took a month off from mid-December to mid-January, the only off-season for gymnastics globally. Elites should stay out of the gym completely. This would enable them to heal both physically and emotionally. The break would

also help those who are experiencing burnout, and help them to regenerate their passion for the sport.

Following is a list of rules for parents and coaches. It's about respecting the sport — any sport — and adapted from positivecoach.org. All of us in the gymnastics community could use a strong dose of positivity right now.

PARENTS

Before the Meet

- Tell your child you are proud of him or her, regardless of how well he or she performs.
- Tell your child to compete hard and have fun. Remind him or her that it's OK to be nervous (“nervous is normal”).
- Make a commitment to yourself to Honor the Sport no matter what others may do.

During the Meet

- Let the coaches coach. Avoid giving your child (or other gymnasts) advice during the meet.
- Fill your child's (and teammates') Emotional Tank.
- Cheer good performances and good efforts by all gymnasts.

- Remember to have fun! Enjoy the day.

After the Meet

- Thank the coaches for their effort.
- Let your child tell you about the meet (avoid giving your post-meet analysis unless asked). Ask open-ended questions: “What was the most/least enjoyable part of the meet?” “What did you learn from the meet?”
- Tell your child again that you are proud of him or her, especially if the meet didn’t go well!

COACHES

Honoring the Game gets to the ROOTS of positive play.

RULES

We refuse to bend the rules to win.

OPPONENTS

A worthy opponent is a gift that brings out our best.

OFFICIALS

Show respect even when we disagree.

TEAMMATES

Never do anything to embarrass our team.

SELF

We live up to our own standards even when others don't.

The Three Themes of Positive Coaching

- Redefining “Winner”: A Positive Coach helps gymnasts redefine what it means to be a “winner” by emphasizing the ELM Tree of Mastery. ELM stands for Effort, Learning and bouncing back from Mistakes.
- Filling Emotional Tanks: A Positive Coach fills gymnasts’ “Emotional Tanks” with encouragement and praise, recognizing that gymnasts need full tanks to compete at their best. A Positive Coach strives to achieve the 5:1 “Magic Ratio”: 5 praises for every 1 criticism.
- Honoring the Game: This gets to the ROOTS of positive play.

International Gymnast Magazine Online - Stretching Out: Changing The Culture

Written by dwight normile

Thursday, 07 June 2018 07:10

This column was in the April 2018 issue of *International Gymnast*.

To subscribe to the print and/or digital edition or to order back issues of *International Gymnast*, [click here](#)

.