

Turning Losses into Victories!

By Ben Peterson w/Ethan Bosch

#16

“I am not concerned that you have fallen; I am concerned that you arise.” – Abraham Lincoln

Attending the collegiate and high school season-ending tournaments has its ups and downs. I work with many different individuals during our summer Camp of Champs wrestling camps, so there are many I get to see and others I just hear about. It is very satisfying to see their improvement, their advancement, and their victories.

But along with the victories there are also disappointments. They work so hard and advance to a point, but then for various reasons they lose a match. The fact that they even qualify for the higher tournaments is commendable, but their goals are to keep winning to the very end. Since there can be only one champion, most wrestlers will end their season with a loss. But that doesn't have to be the end of the story. Read on to learn how to turn that loss into a future victory.

I. Remember the Disappointment.

We have all heard it said, “Men don't cry”. I don't believe that for a second. Men who care deeply about someone or something will often sorrow enough to cry when that person or thing is taken away. Many deny their emotions and harden themselves to reality. Others avoid loving others or pursuing lofty goals, lest they be disappointed.

When I see a wrestler cry at a loss, I take note of how much it meant to him. Crying need not be a sign of weakness. It can be a sign of intense interest and desire. In John 11:35, we read how “Jesus wept” at the graveside of a friend. To this day, I remember crying after several of my losses. I also recall watching several other Champions do the same. God gave us emotions, so let us seek to express them properly. I appreciated a wrestling coach telling me to get away and “just cry” after he saw me struggling at my mother's funeral. He understood the cleansing value of such. I also found it beneficial to be very honest in prayer to God about how much I was missing my Mother.

Instead of denying the reality of a loss, remember the hurt and, yes, “the agony of defeat”. Some harden themselves to the sting of a loss, blocking it out of their thoughts and conversation. I suggest you let it drive you to work harder in future preparations. Let the memory of the loss and its sting inspire you to avoid it and be better prepared for the future. *Hate to lose, love to win, and prepare to win.*

II. Major Your Thoughts on the Hopeful Side.

After a loss or deep disappointment, there will most likely be a period of time when it is hard to see anything positively. In my early years of coaching, I took a graduate class called “Pastoral Counseling”, where we discussed helping individuals and families work through serious tragedies. After class, I spoke to my team's best wrestler, Mark Ravis, who was also taking the class. We agreed that as wrestlers, we reacted to losing in a similar way people react to a major family loss or tragedy. The steps given were: (1) Deny the reality of the loss and its consequences. (2) Question the value of continuing life without whoever/whatever was lost. (3) Begin to see light at the end of the tunnel.

I've seen wrestlers walk in an aimless, almost hopeless daze, for days after a loss. My senior year in high school I recall doing the same after losing by a fall in the finals of the Wisconsin

State Tournament. The many compliments for placing at the tournament could not remove the hurt I had inside. My family helped me step through that time and then on to a much higher level in wrestling and life by just being there and continuing on with life.

I'll never forget watching Dan Gable struggle through the 3 Steps after his only loss through all of high school and college. At first he made statements that showed he was trying to deny the importance it was to him, but we all knew better. Then he questioned the value of even wrestling again, and he tried to fill the void with other things. After a few weeks, I began to hear him speak in a more hopeful way. It was 5 months later when I saw a more mature, wiser, and more focused Dan Gable who was ready to leave that loss in the past and move onto world-level competition. Dan dealt with and learned from that loss and became a World and Olympic Champion – all within 2 years.

III. Redirect Your Goals & Thoughts.

If you have recently experienced a life-changing loss (or know someone who has), don't think you are a loser. You can step on to higher goals after a loss just as well as you can after a win. For example, how does a young man prepare for college wrestling? Most of us did it by "training hard" for high school wrestling. Note I did not say by "winning" in high school. So often wrestlers think they have to win their high school state tournament to be a college wrestler. *No, to wrestle at the next level you must be willing to work and keep improving, no matter how successful you have been in the past.*

Many of you know my brother John never qualified for the Wisconsin State Tournament. The highest he ever placed in college was 5th in the NAIA. But within 5 years of graduation he had won Olympic Silver and then Olympic Gold by a landslide.

I always tell our Campers they are learning to work so they can excel in all areas of life. Dads, Moms, Coaches, Teammates, and Fans, thank you for seeing us through our training, winning, losing, and *training again*. You help us keep our hope alive and reach even higher goals.

***Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: ben@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org.**