

Momisms

By World Champion Mike Houck

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Mike Houck was the United States' first Greco Roman World Champion. Each summer he joins Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps and often speaks of the value of his Mothers slogans. I have asked Mike to share those "Momisms" with you.

After my gold medal victory at the 1985 World Championships, I was often asked by seriously confused interviewers, "What is the secret to your success?" I refer to the interviewers as seriously confused, because I was not considered to be the most likely person to win America's first Greco-Roman World Title, or any title for that matter. I was the extreme underdog! If I were a horse in a horse race, I would have been the longshot bet. I was not a Division 1 athlete. I did not rank in any state high school tournament. I was not on anyone's radar as a potential world-class athlete. So, when I actually won the title, people sincerely wanted to know how it all happened.

My answer has always been "perseverance". That may seem simple, but it is a one-word result of years of conditioning from my mother. I did not realize the value of her "coaching," until it carried me through many challenging life situations, both as a wrestler, and as a human being. I find myself continually referring back to her short, but catchy and colorful, life-lesson expressions and as a north star, guiding my decision-making throughout life.

After my career as an athlete and coach, I moved into a second career as a middle school teacher. During my twelve years of teaching, my belief in the power of perseverance has grown as I see its benefits in others. It is a key trait that sets kids apart from their peers as a predictor of success. Perseverance is far more important than intellect or talent. I find myself in a new role, one that my mother served as the model; to instill that north-star, guiding value in those that I coach and teach. In the classroom, or on the mat, I find myself passing on the profound sayings I learned as a child, prefacing them with the words, "As my dear old ma used to say..." and complete the sentences with mom's words of wisdom which I refer to as "momisms."

Here are the secrets of perseverance as my dear old ma used to say...

Momism #1: "Deal with it!"

This was my mother's mantra! As a foundational value, my parents believed it was their duty to raise their children to be leaders who were independent, responsible, and self-sufficient. There was consistent guidance, but no enabling, rescuing, or "helicopter parenting" when we were capable of doing for ourselves. We were given the freedom to fail, and the belief that failure itself is an opportunity to try again and get it right the next time.

LIFE LESSON: Persevere!

Learn to work out your own problems and keep trying until you figure it out. I had a number of heartbreaking setbacks during my wrestling career. Any one of them could have easily been a reason to quit. I may have done just that, had I not been well trained in my youth.

Momism #2: "You Can Laugh or You Can Cry!"

As unsympathetic as this statement sounds, I ultimately realized that it was much more pleasant and productive to choose and maintain a good attitude when learning to deal with things.

LIFE LESSON: Choose Your Attitude!

Attitude is a choice and it tempers how you approach every blessing and problem in life. The attitude you choose is everything.

Momism #3: *"If You Want To Dance You Have To Pay The Fiddler!"*

Whenever my brother and I would stay up late at night watching old monster movies on TV, mom would calmly watch us drag ourselves out of bed the next morning and casually state this momism, gently reminding us that staying up late was not a reason to be excused from our daily responsibilities. The cost of the fiddler in this case was sleep deprivation.

LIFE LESSON: Every Decision has a Price!

You reap what you sow for good or for bad. Choices have consequences and you are responsible for those consequences. Take responsibility; own your choices. **No excuses!** When I decided to pursue my dream of Olympic and World Gold, I remember counting the cost and committing to do everything I possibly could to win a World or Olympic Title.

Momism #4: *"Don't Be Good. Be Great"*

Mom stole this one from the mother of a famous pro football player. She would say this as I would leave the house for any of my activities.

LIFE LESSON: Pursue Excellence!

Strive to be more. Don't settle for mediocrity. Go for the gold!

Momism #5: *"You Can Do It, Ed."*

My Grandma Edna became a widow in 1950. Left with four kids, a small farmhouse, and lots of debt, Edna decided to dig in her heels, work hard, pay her bills, and do whatever it took to provide for her family. Mom often told the story of how grandma woke up every morning and looked at herself in the mirror resolutely stating; "You can do it, Ed!" This became her battle cry of self-encouragement and, later, became ours. One of my greatest tools for navigating the pressure and extreme training regimen required for success at the World Class level was the ability to continuously convince myself that I could do it.

LIFE LESSON: Encourage Yourself!

Become your own best cheerleader and coach. Develop a pattern of positive self-talk and take control of your inner voice. Grandma Edna figured this one out about 75 years before any sports psychologists did.

It was a lifetime of "momisms" that cultivated my perseverance. It was my ability to persevere and stay the course that cultivated the inner characteristics that fueled my development as a world-class wrestler and prepared me to win my world title. I had tremendous coaches, teammates and mentors that honed my skills and wrestling techniques, but it was the basic psychological foundation to persevere over all obstacles that carried me through. This abiding motivation was modeled and established at home during my childhood. Although I credit both of my parents for this strong foundation of self-efficacy, it is often those straight-forward, colorful "momisms" that resound in my brain when life gets tough fueling my perseverance to overcome with purpose and confidence.