

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

4 Gold-Nuggets That Will Improve Athletic Performance

By David Benzel



If you type “athletic performance books” into the Amazon browser, you will get over 3,000 results. And if you decide to niche down to “youth sports books” you will get another 10,000 suggestions.

But who has the time to read all of that?

As a parent of a young athlete, extra time is usually spent shuttling to and from practices and games — and of course cheering on your kid's efforts.

We get it. And we're here to help.

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Here are 4 gold nuggets from some must-reads in the athletic performance and mindset space — plus we'll give you the real-life application.

1) Does Your Athlete Have Competition Backwards?

Have you ever heard of “decompetition?”

It's actually a coined-term referring to a destructive type of competition.

Authors, David Shields, and Brenda Bredemeier wrote about it in their groundbreaking research in, ***True Competition: A Guide to Pursuing Excellence in Sport and Society***.

After studying the Latin origins of the word, COMPETITION, they concluded that our culture typically interprets it negatively. We often see competitors as striving AGAINST each other.

A definition that aligns better with the original root meaning is:

Competition is a striving WITH opponents.

According to the authors, “competition is designed to bring out physical excellence and the exhilaration, excitement, and joy that come from pushing one's boundaries toward peak performance.”

Real-Life Application: Parents should consistently set the tone for how their athlete views competition. Switch out language — where appropriate — to promote a more positive view, for example:

- Instead of viewing competition as a battle, see it as a partnership toward improvement
- Goals should not be focused on superiority, but rather on excellence
- Opponents are not the enemy or obstacle but rather a partner and enabler who causes you to be your best

2) Is There a More Effective Way to Praise?

How do you compliment or praise your kids? Do you tell your daughter that she is smart or your son that he is handsome?

Both comments, are essential to developing self-esteem.

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However, did you know certain kinds of praise inspire and motivate your child to work harder at becoming better?

Carol Dweck — a professor at Stanford and best-selling author of *Mindset* — did a study with over 400 5th-graders that revealed some fascinating truths.



In a nutshell, kids that were praised for their **EFFORT** on a test rather than their innate **INTELLIGENCE** worked harder, worked longer, and enjoyed it more than those 5th-graders who were commended for their “smarts.”

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The research supports the idea that praise is good. **But giving specific praise about process and effort is a more effective motivator than praising intelligence or ability.**

Real-Life Application: Encourage a growth mindset in your athlete by focusing on:

- Efforts — regardless of the results
- Progress that is made — even when it is small
- Work ethic that is applied
- Stepping out of comfort zones

Limit the amount of praise you give for things they were born being able to do naturally. Or things they have no control over — like good looks, size, or abilities that come easy.

3) Is Your Athlete Listening To His Inner Critic?

If your athlete's performance is ever impacted by nerves, he's probably listening to his inner critic.

Over 40 years ago, Timothy Gallwey spoke to this dilemma, in a book called ***The Inner Game of Tennis, The Classic Guide to the Mental Side of Peak Performance***.

Gallwey suggested that there are two selves: Self 1 and self 2.

- Self 1 is a judge and critic that is analytical, ego-driven, and worries
- Self 2 is more intuitive, trained, physical, and automatic

The secret to peak performance, according to Gallwey's theory, is to get Self 1 out of the way so that Self 2 can do what it knows to do. This is accomplished by not being so caught up in the outcome, and by getting Self 1 to focus on some activity like the:

- Sound of the ball when it bounces toward you on the court
- Feel of the water gliding over your head during freestyle swim
- Sound you hear when your foot hits the center of a soccer ball

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Real-Life Application: Share the theory of Self 1 and Self 2 with your young athlete because it is a visual that most kids can understand and picture when they are in competition.

Talk through the specific activity that she can use to “distract” Self 1 from negative chatter in her mind. Practice visualizing the action before a game.

4) Are There Ways to Grow Talent?

Wouldn't it be great to have the tools to grow your athlete's talent?

Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code*, reveals that greatness is not born, but can be grown. He did extensive research around talent “hotbeds” across the globe to discover 3 elements that allow you to develop natural talents into stronger skills.

These 3 components can help your child to optimize performance in sports, art, music, and math:

- **Deep practice** — operate at the edges of ability, where you make mistakes because the mistakes make you smarter. There is neuroscience behind this phenomenon that is fascinating but complex. Watch this [5-minute TedTalk](#) to have a better understanding.
- **Ignition** — Passion that motivates and a higher level of commitment
- **Master Coaching** — Someone who fuels passion, inspires deep practice, brings out the best in athletes, and is willing to allow performance to happen.

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Real-Life Application: Recognize that your athlete can grow in their talent regardless of what they were born with.

Focus on inspiring your child to work through the difficult challenges that come during practice — reminding them that progress is made in those spaces.

Take the Next Step

Each of these gold-nuggets is surrounded by valuable and actionable truths in the books mentioned. They are well-worth reading for coaches and parents. (The links we provided are affiliate links.)

Now it's time to put words to action. Choose one of the gold nuggets to apply to yours and your athlete's life.

Be someone else's inspiration by sharing in the comments below the action you plan to take. Peak performance may be one step away.

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David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* www.growingchampionsforlife.com