

# GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

*Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports*

## 3 Positive Ways to Respond to a Performance Slump

By David Benzel



Have you ever had to coach an athlete through any of these scenarios?

- Baseball player in a hitting slump
- Soccer star in a scoring drought
- Figure-skater who lost an element to her routine
- Gymnast fearing a new technique
- Tennis champ struggling with his serve
- Swimmer suddenly slower in meets

A **performance slump** is a tough space to travel through – for anyone involved.

But as the coach YOU can make a difference in your athlete's interpretation of what is going on.

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Your response can lead your athlete in an optimistic and hopeful direction.

Or it can cause them to view the future through a more gloom-and-doom lens.

Here are 3 knee-jerk reactions to performance slumps and 3 better responses that can turn everything around.

## **1) This slump should never have happened.**

The best coaches empower their athletes to develop into skilled, stronger, more confident competitors.

There is no room for regret when we are looking to equip our kids. Yet as coaches and parents, we sometimes get stuck in the “if only” mindset.

- If only I hadn't pushed so hard
- If only I had taught her to do this
- If only he had listened to me better

With these kinds of statements, the focus is on the negative AND the past. It is never helpful to “cry over spilled milk” and your response during this time will significantly impact the mindset of your athlete.

**Instead, choose this: Performance slumps are a NORMAL occurrence in sports.**

Athletes need to hear that they are not alone or unique in their struggle. Anyone that is working hard and competitively will naturally come to a place where they plateau or even take a few steps back.

Coaches who don't panic during a slump and realize that it is a **regular** part of growth can encourage their athletes to stay focused on moving forward.

## **2) This slump is a real threat to your future.**

Usually, there are long-term goals in regards to sports participation.

An unexpected performance slump not only disrupts the upcoming games and current season but it is tempting to worry about all the future goals your athlete may have.

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This is a time when if you aren't careful, it would be easy to focus on the "what ifs."

- What if she misses her window of opportunity?
- What if our team doesn't go to states because he isn't playing well?
- What if I can't get him out of this slump?



**Instead, choose: This performance slump is an OPPORTUNITY for you.**

So many positive things can come from the challenges we face in life. Your athlete needs to hear this from you.

Tell him that this could be a time of:

- Learning new things
- Thriving in a difficult space
- Adjusting and growing into a stronger athlete
- Supporting his teammates

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Focus on the opportunity and realize that the real threat is yours and your athlete's attitude during this time.

### **3) Things will never be the same.**

When we are in the midst of a setback, it is easy to make negative assumptions. But the fact is, we really can't predict the future.

Don't allow yourself or your athlete to slip into an "oh well" attitude.

- Oh well, I guess this won't change
- Oh well, there is nothing I can do now
- Oh well, things will never be the same again

This mindset leaves your athlete powerless to work through any challenges that come.

**Instead, choose to believe that: This too shall PASS.**

Encourage your athlete to "keep on keeping on." It is inevitable that things will change.

Focus on the elements of the sport that are foundational and eventually performance will improve.

Coaches that gently prod their athletes forward with quiet confidence, help them to be optimistic about the change that will ultimately occur.

### **Power in a Positive Response**

Coaches set the tone for the entire team by impacting the mindset of individual athletes. There is great power in a positive response.

At some point, you will have to coach an athlete through a performance slump.

Be sure to keep your approach positive and realistic so that you can empower your athlete to come out on the other side a better competitor.

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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](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com)