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Q: Do you have a good speech on the importance of sports participation for boys and girls?

I am often asked for a copy of my speech on "The Difference Between Good and Great: The Lessons of Sport". Unfortunately, I've never reduced this speech to a formal document, usually speaking from bullet point notes. I have transcribed these notes below. Please feel free to use these ideas as you see fit. I firmly believe that someone who achieves excellence in any endeavor has the same characteristics and work ethic as the champion in sport. – Donna Lopiano

1. Belief in Perfection. No player can perform perfectly all of the time and we certainly aren't perfect as people. However, perfection in the performance of a sport skill is possible. Most players have experienced "the perfect shot", "the perfect swing" or "the perfect fake" at some moment in their careers. If you try to give your best effort every time you do something and don't quite achieve it, the result will be twice that of the person who didn't give their best. Perfection will happen as long as you give your very best effort every time.
2. Accepting Blame for Errors/Supporting Your Teammates. Great players always look inward to see what they could have done differently to have prevented a loss or an error. They never blame someone else on their team or look for excuses. Great players support each other and encourage their teammates. They also acknowledge their errors. They are accountable.

3. Repetition is Key to the Pursuit of Excellent Performance. If you want to be a great writer; write a thousand pages. If you want to have a great tennis forehand; hit 10,000 forehands. If you want a great curve ball; throw 10,000 curveballs. People who are great at what they do always count repetitions; never the amount of time they spend on a project.
4. Play Against the Very Best. An athlete doesn't get good by playing against someone he or she can easily beat. If you win against someone who is not very good, you know you are a little better than "not very good". When you win or measure yourself against the best and achieve your goal, you know you are the best. If you don't win, you learn the difference between giving your best effort and winning. Always seek competition against someone better than you are. Always seek the most demanding challenge. When great players practice, they envision themselves in the most difficult and challenging situations so there's no surprise or nervousness when they actually find themselves in that situation.

5. Never Say "I can't", "It's impossible" or "but". If you think something is "impossible" or think you cannot do it, it will be impossible. Don't ever let yourself think or say the words "impossible" or "I can't". Try not to use the word "but" either. "But" always prefaces an excuse why you can't! Great athletes always say, "why not" or "I can do this."
6. Concentration. Concentration is "sequential attention to detail." Great athletes create and use "checklists" in their minds. When the time comes to do a skill, they think sequentially according to that list -- one step at a time in the order each step is to be performed, leaving no detail forgotten. When you are concentrating on a list of important things there is no time to be nervous, worried or distracted. If you are working on your checklist, all of your attention is focused on the essentials of performance.
7. Never Make the Same Mistake Twice. People who are great always make mistakes because they are always looking for a better way to do something. The reason why they are great is because they don't make the same mistake twice. If a person never makes a mistake, it's probably because they aren't challenging themselves to become better. They certainly are not trying new things.
8. Be a Student; a Scientist. Great players are perpetual students; reading everything they can about their sport; constantly talking to people about how to better perform a skill and always asking "why?" Once you stop learning and questioning, you stop being great.
9. Demonstrate How Good You are By Example, Not Talk. Great players know that it is easier to talk than do. They don't waste time talking. They demonstrate their greatness by performing. They also recognize that whenever they play, young people will be watching and will try to imitate them. They recognize that they are always admired and emulated, whether they want to be or not, on and off the court, they are role models.
10. Illusion or Reality of Confidence. Great athletes either have confidence or make believe they are confident. It doesn't really matter which. All great athletes are worried about performing well and are nervous before or during a contest. The great athletes simply hide it. They learn to act confident and not show their fear. The illusion of confidence is as good as confidence itself.

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