



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE

Watching the Olympics with Your Youth Athletes

As you follow the Olympics, watching your favorite events with youth athletes you are coaching and/or parenting, you will encounter many teachable moments. Here is advice on what to look for and how to use those teachable moments to develop Better Athletes, Better People from Tina Syer, PCA's Chief Impact Officer, who also is a youth sports coach and parent.

It's up to parents and coaches to help kids draw out life lessons from sports. Sometimes we think kids will simply absorb the lessons that are obvious to us as adults, but that is not often the case. One way to get at those life lessons is by **"asking rather than telling"** when watching sports together.

For example, watching the recent NCAA Softball World Series with my boys, I asked them right after a walk-off home run, "What do you think she was thinking before that at-bat?" They talked about how she was probably nervous, and we had a wonderful conversation about how she handled those feelings and still hit the game-winner. Then we talked about other times when people feel nervous (before presenting something to the class at school, before performing in an assembly/concert, etc.) and how they could use techniques from sports (like taking deep breaths) to help them in these other settings.

As you watch the Olympics with your youth athletes, keep your eye out for **both positive and negative life lessons**. If you see poor sportsmanship, you might ask, "What did you think of that? What would you have done differently there?"

On the more positive side, we often see Olympians **thanking the officials after a competition**. Beach volleyball star Kerri Walsh Jennings is particularly good at this, and it can be a wonderful example for our kids – to remind them to thank sports officials, yes – but also to take that practice more widely into their lives by thanking people who often go under-appreciated, such as food servers, janitors, bus drivers, teachers, coaches and more.

We also see Olympians **picking up their teammates** (and perhaps even an opponent) after a loss or disappointing performance. Talk with your kids about times when their classmates, friends and/or teammates are down and what they can specifically do to pick them up - this might be in the middle of a performance or just after it's over.

Life lessons also are available from the coverage of Olympians **attending events other than their own**, when cameras often find them cheering in the stands. These athletes are supporting their Olympic teammates (even outside their own sport), which can plant the seed for your kids to support their friends or classmates at others sports events, or music/drama performances, etc.

Also keep a **close eye on the medal ceremonies**. That's when you'll see the opportunity for life lessons in winning and losing gracefully. For example, if a sorely disappointed Silver medalist can overcome narrowly missing

continues

Watching the Olympics with Your Youth Athletes, continued

Gold and share sincere congratulations, that is an opportunity to talk with kids about times they were disappointed with an outcome and compare it to what we're seeing on TV. "I remember when you did not get to sit first chair in the orchestra and you were disappointed. But just like this Silver Medalist, you kept your head up and congratulated Jonathan, who narrowly edged you out. That made me really proud of you."

One last thing to keep in mind is the **Olympic motto** – "**Citius, Altius, Fortius**" – which translates to "Faster, Higher, Stronger." In our PCA workshops, we often ask athletes, "Why is this not 'Fastest, Highest, Strongest?'" The reason is that the Olympic spirit and the true nature of competition calls on athletes to give their own best personal performances. Many athletes enter the Olympic Games knowing they don't have a shot at the podium, but they still give their best personal performance. This is a huge lesson for our kids – in life, our focus should be on giving our own best personal performance – comparing ourselves to ourselves, not just to those around us.