



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2015

Punishing Success: Basketball Coach Suspended for Beating Opponents Too Badly

Athletic coaches have sometimes been fired for failing to forge winning teams. But now we hear about a high-school girls' basketball coach who has been suspended for being victorious.

The victim of his own success is California resident Michael Anderson, now serving a two-game suspension because his team was too good. As CBS Los Angeles [tells us](#):



Coach Michael Anderson, who coaches both the junior varsity and varsity squads of Arroyo Valley High School's girls [sic] basketball, was handed the suspension after defeating Bloomington High School 161-2.

Anderson faced criticism over his decision not to take out his starters until the third quarter, and he was accused of running up the score.

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This action is an outgrowth of the "self-esteem" movement, the idea that a thorough shellacking could bruise feelings and egos. And forget about frowning on scoring highly; there's a [growing trend today](#) in children's sports to not keep score at all lest some little snowflakes' psyches should melt.

This mentality is reflected in the "charge" against Anderson: "he was accused of running up the score." What phraseology. It sounds as if it belongs side-by-side with "accused of using steroids" and "accused of corking his bat" — except there was a time when "running up the score" was just called "doing your best."

And many disagree with what some might call this athletics Marxism. CBS quotes parent Martha Vodinez as saying about the Anderson suspension, "Are you teaching them [the kids] to be a loser?" As for no-score sports, *Athletic Business* [quotes](#) youth soccer official Daryl Leinweber as stating, "You still need to have competitive games to know how well you've developed [a] skill. Winning and losing also tells you how well you're doing."

But some don't seem to want us to know how well we're doing. CBS writes that the San Bernardino Unified School District states that the Anderson suspension "is a lesson in compassion and respect for opponents." There was no comment on respect and compassion for the coach or on how the punishment might affect his self-esteem. And CBS quotes district official Maria Garcia as saying, "We are really emphasizing that we want them to pursue victory with honor."

That's an interesting thesis. What is honor? There was a time when people might say, as did authors Dr. Gerald A. Walford and Gerald E. Walford in *The Golf Superbook*, "Honor your opponent by doing your



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best.” They [continued](#):

Many people prefer the cooperation games instead of the competitive games. Actually, the competitive games are cooperation games. Both opponents honor each other by doing their best. The means each cooperates into helping the other to do their best.... We are performing to overcome obstacles and distractions set up by the opposition.... Get your mind set to hoping your opponent can give you his best shot.

... What is actually happening is that competition is not against the opposition.... Competition is against ourselves.... Can we control ourselves to play to our maximum?

(We see this type of “competitive cooperation” in the market as well, where competition causes businesses to improve their products.)

What the authors articulate is a higher motivation to which Garcia — who’s involved with an entity tasked with molding young minds — seems oblivious. As an Indian saying tells us, “The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.”

And any true competitor operates thus. Consider my previous life, many moons ago, as a professional tennis player (really). During one period I found myself with practice partners whom I could defeat easily. Many say it’s difficult to derive much benefit playing with lesser players, but my focus wasn’t them. Could I concentrate and apply myself well enough so that I’d make hardly any errors and lose only a handful of points? I took no pride in “beating” them by a wide margin. That was simply a by-product of my true goal: a polished performance.

Notable here is that these lesser players, whether meeting me in practice or tournaments, never were upset by their defeats (in fact, losing a close heart-breaker is usually the more bitter pill); they never would have expected me to attempt anything less than my best.

This brings us to a famous line from Rudyard Kipling’s [poem](#) “If,” a line displayed above the entrance of Wimbledon, site of tennis’ most prestigious tournament: “If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same.” As a very young aspiring tennis player, I was a late bloomer and often the one on the receiving end of a thumping by a polished competitor. Admittedly, I didn’t generally take it well as a kid. But as C.S. Lewis said, “Pain is the megaphone God uses to get through to deaf ears.” My defeats taught me more than my victories. They built character. I not only learned to tolerate failure and soldier on, but, ultimately, that winning and losing on the athletic field isn’t what truly matters in life. Even more importantly, I began, as God would have us do, to develop the capacity to be happy for a victorious opponent.

When adults de-emphasize sports competition and seek to “equalize” matters, they deny the superior players the chance to “defeat” their previous selves, and they deny the lesser players the character-building experiences — that megaphone of pain — that attends what we regard as failure. Is this really compassionate? Just as children learn languages (and most everything else) best while young, they also learn to deal with disappointment and defeat best while young. And if they don’t learn to tolerate the relatively inconsequential things called sporting disappointments, how will they later in life handle a career failure, marital problems, a financial collapse, or a terminal illness? Suicide comes to mind.

This returns us to the self-esteem movement, which many critics say has bred a generation of spoiled brats. The *Globe and Mail*’s Margaret Wenthe wrote in her 2011 [piece](#) “Inside the entitlement generation” of “kids who’ve always been told they’re smart, and never pushed too hard,” “students [who] strenuously object if they don’t get the marks they feel entitled to,” and quoted a professor who



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said, “They bring assignments in late and think we’ll mark them without penalty.” She later wrote, “The entitlement mindset didn’t come from nowhere. It came from us. It came from a generation of adults who believed that kids should never be ... told the truth about their abilities, or learn that getting what you want is sometimes hard ... [or] be allowed to fail.”

Most significantly, the emphasis on self-esteem — now a euphemism for the sin of pride — contradicts what millennia of man’s wisdom and the Christian ideal teach: We should not be watering and fertilizing inflated egos.

We should be encouraging humility, a virtue.

As to this, a wise man I know once explained well the difference between humility and humiliation: Humility is when you know what you are and accept it. Humiliation is when you learn you’re not what you thought you were and can’t handle it.

Children need to find out what they’re not so they can better learn what they are. After all, how many things in life are more important than knowing thyself?



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