

The book *True Competition* brings a lot of interesting points that I have never thought of or heard of, specifically decompetitors, to my attention. Decompetitor is not a word recognized in Microsoft Word, because it puts a red squiggly line under the word. In the past month, I have had numerous conversations with colleagues about the terminology and key points that were brought up in this book. The book has caused me to open my eyes and recognize a lot more happening around me, because I have an idea of what to look for after reading this book. In this critique I will cover how to make and maintain true competitors, characteristics of decompetitors, ways to promote intrinsic motivation, and ways to create positive peer relationships. I will not only bring describe these points but provide personal and public evidence.

The very first thing that a youth athlete should be taught is what it means to be a true competitor. The youth need to know that a “contest is supposed to be a partnership between the athletes” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009) competing so that both sides can grow mutually and that both competitors are able to succeed, which does not mean both sides have to win. To begin the contest each competitor should have a “specific and realistic goal” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009) that is obtainable and each contest should be allowed a chance to grow. The contest cannot be about winning and losing, or else decompetition will build within the athletes. The contest should be set up so you are only competing against yourself. I know when I was in high school I always looked back at the game against the team we were playing to see a) how many points, b) how well I shot free throws, c) how many assists, and d) how many turnovers I had. I had a goal of improving all of my statistics, which would help my team

win. And now I don't think I was competing for the correct reason, because I was trying to improve so my team could win and it should have been enough for me to improve.

Coaches have the responsibility to get the point across to their athletes that a contest is about building a team bond and improving their skills. And at the end of the competition they need to shake the other teams hand and thank them for helping them to reach their goals. Athletes should also thank the referees or officials, because "they are there to implement the rules" (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009), not to make you look bad. Two recent examples of times that officials have made an incorrect call have occurred in the past couple weeks, and the coach/managers took 2 completely different approaches. Green Bay Packers coach Mike McCarthy had an official make an incorrect call to end the game and the Packers ended up losing due to the call, but in the end he heard the official was getting so many verbally abusive phone calls that he called and left a message about how he understood that he had to make a decision and he needs to stand behind the call he made. It was encouraging for the official that everyone thinks ruined the season for one team. The opposite of this happened during the Yankees post-game interview with Joe Girardi about a bad call. Girardi publicly put the blame on an umpire, because there would have been only a 1 to 0 lead for the Tigers instead it was a 3 to 0 lead. The Tigers ended up winning 3 to 0. It was clearly the incorrect call on the field, but the umpire had to make an instinct call about how he saw the play occur. The athletes will follow in your footsteps, so if the coach is a decompetitor then there is a higher chance the athletes will become a decompetitor.

Now I want to talk about the characteristics of a decompetitor and how I have seen them recently. A decompetitor refers to a games as "winning is not everything, it is the only

thing” or “if you get second place you are the first loser”. The second quote my cousin liked to say a lot about when he, or someone else, was competing. It made me nervous competing against him or when he was present, because he always thought you had to win. His wife is so competitive that she takes the fun out of playing games, even board games with family members. She is such a decompetitor that if you say “dolphin” and the word is “dolphins” she will not give it to you. The “drama of competing and uncertainty undermines the goals” of a contest when you play with them and it takes the enjoyment out of the contest for those who want to be just be in a contest. When it comes to the officials of the game decompetitors try to outwit them. The big news in the NBA offseason was the amount flops that were occurring two opponents ran into each other. The flop makes the referee think it is a charge so the other player will get a foul and your team will get the ball back, but it is just a try to fool the referees.

An observation that I made while I was coaching powder puff football for homecoming week was that the girls only “take pleasure in wanting to beat the other team” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009). The juniors and seniors play one football game a year, so each high school female plays 2 games in high school and it is solely built on winning. I coached the seniors this year and we lost when they were juniors so they had one more chance to go out as winners, but we ended up losing. It was a very close, competitive match, but the girls only knew they lost. Some said they weren’t coming to school because they couldn’t show their face after a loss to the juniors. The girls on my team did not want to shake the hands of the juniors, because we lost but we lost fair and square, they just flat out beat us. I got them to shake hands and go out with class compared to going out as poor sports for not thanking the other team for the great contest.

A scary part of this game and other games that I have coached is when a decompetitor gets in a bad mood and starts to get physical. In the past year I have experienced two examples of this. The first was during the powder puff game where a girl hit another girl and knocked her to the ground and it looked like it hurt really badly but the girl got back up right away. The other time was in a basketball game and a girl on the other team started bumping my girls and hit two girls in the face with her elbow. I took the opportunity to explain to the girls what would happen if anyone on our team acted that way and how unsafe it is for all when athletes get in that mindset.

A very interesting part from this book is that “males are supposed to be the ones that go for the jugular” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009) and that is fueled by parents, siblings, family, and the community. Females, on the other hand, are supposed to compete for “male’s attention” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009), which is what happens at the powder puff game. There are a lot more males in the stands than females. If I think about it more the powder puff game is a really nasty way of getting decompetitors to show up and a form of cheap entertainment for the males in the student body. The males want to come out to see how the females compete and perform, but the book has an interesting quote about when a coach says that “you throw like a girl” it is meant as a negative comment, but really it should be taken as a compliment. In most cases a female has better form than a male does, which is why this should be a compliment.

A major way the book says to prevent decompetition is to have the athletes be intrinsically motivated. “Intrinsic motivation and likeliness to be a decompetitor are indirectly related” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009). This means the more intrinsic motivation will produce

a lower rate of decompetition. So the real thing we as coaches have to do is promote intrinsic motivation in our athletes. On page 69 is the “3 C’s of promoting intrinsic motivation” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009). The first C stands for competence, which refers to having skills to match the challenge from the competition. The second C stands for connection, which refers to making relationships between members on the team and against other true competitors. The third C stands for control, which refers to the athletes wanting to be able to make a personal choice when it comes to the competition.

Once the intrinsic motivation is established for the athletes the coach needs to let the athletes know that you are allowed to “take a break from the competition” (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009). A great example of this occurred a few years ago during a college softball game. A girl came up to bat and hit a homerun, but when she got to first base she tore her ACL, it was her first career homerun and she couldn’t run the bases. According to rules if a person cannot finish running the bases the homerun does not count, and your teammates are not allowed to help you run the bases. Athletes on the other team decided to pick her up and carry her around to touch all of the bases so she was able to complete her first homerun. This is a perfect example of how a competitor would react compared to a decompetitor.

The other way a coach can promote positive steps towards becoming a competitor is a 6 step process that creates a positive peer culture. The six steps are know yourself, focus on relationship, build enthusiasm, build shared values, build shared responsibilities, and ritualize team norms. If an athlete is able to build relationships and want to play with their teammates they are more likely to compete at a level that will not jeopardize the game or progression by becoming a decompetitor.

Once a competitor is established there is always a possibility for them to transfer over to a decompetitor and this paragraph will explain a few ways this happens. First is when your contest is against a team of lower or higher competition. If the contest is with a lower competitor, the tension from the lower team will cause them to act up and possibly make the better team react. The same can be said for when you are playing a higher competitor, the higher competitor might start fooling around and that is when injuries occur. The last threat to competition is when the fans, parents, and society decide they want to yell at the players when they do something wrong. They say really demoralizing things to the athlete, which lowers the athletes self-confidence and that could lead to a transition to a decompetitor.

Developing decompetitors can also occur in the classroom and decompetition is promoted by creating competition between classmates. If the teacher bases the course grades on a curve, the students are just aiming at beating each other, rather than trying to master the material. Research from the book said that competition created less effort on projects that were graded on a curve and each student is more likely to cheat in order to beat the other students in the class.

After reading this book I found techniques that will help me improve my coaching and develop the youth into true competitors. I now know what to look for when it comes to identifying a decompetitor and making sure that my youth stay safe around decompetitors. The biggest idea that I am going to take from the book is making sure the athletes on my team know what a contest really is not a chance to win or lose, but a chance to get closer to achieving their goal. Along with this I will talk with each individual athlete so they know what they are working towards by the end of the season.