

Champions always challenge themselves to become better

By MK Lim

"A TRUE champion is not the person who has always been the best, but a person who becomes a champion, through their personal effort, and their intention to improve," said sportsman and coach John Gormley.

He explained that it may be relatively easy for some to win because they are highly talented, but that does not necessarily make them champions. He said champion persons (not just champion sports persons) always challenge themselves to become better and take every opportunity to develop.

Gormley has the credentials to define a champion – in his youth he won various awards and medals in gymnastics, swimming and pole vaulting. He participated in trampolining, soccer and rugby union football at amateur club level in England.

His foray into sports started in primary school, when he had a very capable physical education (PE) teacher. Gormley and his friends were country kids – their PE teacher taught them how to swim. Back then, PE was always a lot of fun.

This was when Gormley got a glimpse of what was possible and what wasn't. In secondary school later, he once again had a wonderful PE teacher, who was an ex-army officer. Gormley participated in all sorts of sports: gymnastics, swimming, diving, cricket, football and cross-country. "You name it, we did it," he said.

Gormley went on to become

the head of Secondary School Physical Education Departments in England and then Australia, where he migrated with his young family in 1970. He later lectured at university on a range of subjects, including Teacher Education (PE) and Sports Science. He also provided coaching support to the Australian Olympic and Paralympic teams and individuals for every Olympics from 1976 until 2004.

To Gormley, coaching is all about helping people on the journey to be the best person they can be. "Sport is enormously empowering because it teaches children how to be dissatisfied with the status quo, and how to take steps to improve through personal effort," he said.

This helps children to grow up to be warm and responsible – perfect for an upbuilding role in society. Sport teaches them not to be satisfied with the way things are, and to take steps to change things for the better.

When sport is taught well, children learn to control their anxieties and fears and learn that dreams can be made to happen. They will not always win, but then the coach can say to them, "I can help you to get from here (where you are), to there (where you want to be). This is what you have to do. Let's work together." And step-by-step, the coach and the child work together to inch closer to the goal.

Having a good coach is crucial. "In some sport, such as swimming and gymnastics, it is harder if you have started by learning the wrong technique," said Gormley.

Even though Australia is perceived as a sporting nation, young people train largely through the financial means of their parent – paying coaching fees and travelling with their children to tournaments.

On modern sport, Gormley said there is often a selection process, and unless a person has both the genetic make-up and the socio-cultural support, it is very difficult to become an elite sportsperson.

"However, in my long coaching experience, it is often not the people with all the natural advantages who rise to the top of their sport, but those with a passion, a desire, a belief, a dream. People who, from very early on, have learnt how to persist. The knock-em-down-rise-up-again types – they are the true

champions, they are the ones who last," he said.

Apart from persistence, the other mark of a true champion is their humanity.

Although champions may be ruthless in

competition, and must play to win – for that is the responsibility of sport (to do anything less would be dishonouring the sport and their opponent), off the playing field, they are caring, compassionate people.

"True champions show friendship and goodwill. I have never met a champion who doesn't put more back in than they got out," said Gormley.

Sadly however, there are many so-called sports champions who are not good role models – they are ruthless, they cheat and exploit others. After all, it is a tough world at the top – many vying for very limited resources, be it kudos, money or status. They may be called champions to

the world, but to Gormley, they are not champions by any stretch of the

imagination. The same can be said of sports coaches.

When sport is done well, the benefits are enormous. The opposite is also true – children can be used as tools, whether for the coach or the nation. Parents have the role of ensuring that the interests of their children are kept at the forefront.

From an early stage, parents need to keep in mind what happens when their children have reached the pinnacle.

According to Gormley, top sports people are often very successful in their professions later in life as well. He attributes this to a non-acceptance of second best and being highly-oriented to achieving. However, this is conditional upon having carefully tailored training regimes through their school years, where there is time made for education as well as training.

Otherwise they do not become well-rounded people, and upon retiring from sport, they may find that they are forever disadvantaged in their careers because they started their second professional journey too late, or they do not have the necessary educational skills or the work experience to succeed.

"Every child is a winner if they make the effort to change, and having made the effort, accept the responsibility for the results. That's where the empowerment lies. The child slowly and surely learns how their personal effort reduces the gap between what he intended and what becomes eventuality."

• Comments can reach the writer via columnist@theborneopost.com.

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