A Short Course on Failure in Sports
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Failure: A reaction to falling short of objectively or subjectively determined performance standards marked by an absence of curiosity, a self-defeating attitude, and an inability to frame the experience as a vital source of new learning

A Twelve-step prescription for Failure

- Explain negative outcomes as 1) inevitable; 2) due to personal shortcomings; 3) permanent
- Treat failure as something to avoid at all cost, you won't fail at something you don't try!
- Focus attention exclusively on long-term goals, downplaying present-moment accomplishments
- Doggedly persist at what you think you should do, rather than find your true passion
- Dwell on past experiences and future expectations, rather than cultivating present-moment awareness
- Whenever possible make negative upward, rather than downward social comparisons
- Criticize yourself for not mastering new skills quickly and effortlessly.
- Hesitate to try something new, interrupt a routine, or take a break from unrelenting training
- Treat injury with impatience and criticism of the body for being weak
- View winning at any cost as the sole motive driving your ambition
- Adopt a fixed mindset – the view you hold of yourself – that is impervious to change
- Minimize social connections, treat others as adversarial competitors

“I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”
- Michael Jordan
Learning from shortcomings

- Identify descriptively & non-judgmentally factors that contributed to the outcome
- What were your expectations? How realistic were they?
- Evaluate the prevailing circumstances at the time of the performance
- What aspects went well?
- Frame the experience through the lens of gratitude
- Who can you turn to for support and guidance?
- What change(s) are you willing to make?

Mindfulness Attitudes

- Acceptance
- Beginner's Mind (curiosity)
- Letting go
- Non-judging
- Non-striving
- Patience
- Trust

Key References

- Mark Anshel, In Praise of Failure
- Angela Duckworth, Grit
- Tony Dungy, Quiet Strength
- Carolyn Dweck, Mindset
- Stuart Firestein, Failure: Why Science is So Successful
- Vanessa Zuisei Goddard, Still Running
- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living
- Keith Kaufman et al, Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement
- George Mumford, The Mindful Athlete

“It’s the journey that matters. Learning is more important than the test. Practice well and the games will take care of themselves”
- Tony Dungy, Quiet Strength