

## Winning

You don't enter an athletic contest to lose. Not only does entering "just to play the game" cheat you of self-testing, it also cheats your opponents of a worthy adversary to test themselves against. Nevertheless, if you study martial arts with the idea of simply winning an athletic contest, you leave the idea of a traditional budo and enter the realm of a martial sport.

Traditional budo, as I see it, is meant for both self-defense and self-development. But, you may interdict, you don't enter a self-defense situation to lose, either. And certainly, if your goal is to develop yourself, entering the art to fail is nonsensical. Therefore, one might conclude, as did Vince Lombardi, that "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing."

One learns more by losing than by winning, but one never *tries* to lose in order to learn. One always improves oneself with the idea of winning, but if one wins, does that mean one does not need improvement? No wonder Westerners do not understand why traditional *budoka* train. No wonder Westerners and Easterners alike turn martial ways into martial sports. Why dedicate oneself to self-improvement, testing oneself without a contest or challenging oneself without a foe?

Let's sort this out. In the contemporary world, we have lost the idea of narrowly defining the terms of our discussion in favor of more casual interactions in which more people can participate. Unfortunately, undefined terms inevitably result in either confusion or, at the minimum, sloppy logic. Admittedly, you can't expect a formal doctoral dissertation in a one-page magazine essay or internet blog, but if we don't try to be precise in a published article, we are bound to contribute to the illogic of an already illogical society that claims its lack of logic is really personal freedom of expression. In this spirit, I offer the following assertion: Where Winning is usually considered Success, Success is not necessarily the same as Winning.

In an athletic contest our predetermined goal is to win. In losing, we may achieve success at learning what we need to improve, but that is simply so can we win the next time. We therefore ignore the idea of "success" being anything other than the gold medal, trophy, prize money, or the like. In a self-defense situation, success is extricating oneself from the situation, not beating the bad guy into bloody belching on the boardwalk. You may call it "winning" if the other guy did not get your wallet, but the confrontation is not a contest in which you might get *his* wallet, is it? Strictly speaking, "winning" is not applicable here, but success is.

You can win a match, win a race, or win a prize.

In a match, there is a loser. Winning a *match* equates success with winning because both contestants entered the match knowing what the definition of success was.

In a race, there may be a dozen losers. Winning a *race* usually produces three winners (gold, silver and bronze—or win, place, show), but probably because of our individualistic society, we tend to think of first place as the only winner—everyone else is a loser, in our contorted perception. Why do they offer three places then? Because it is often so difficult to determine a "best of the field" that any contestant that comes close to first is

pretty darn good. For the same reason, there is more than one footrace or horserace in a given season and more than one winner in each of those races.

When someone wins a *prize*, there may be a million losers. In winning the lottery, Publisher's Clearing House, etc., it is not your skill or wisdom that produces success, but dumb luck. You are a winner, but not the best of the bunch in any way, shape, or form. It is more accurate to dispense with "win" or "succeed" in this case and simply say that you were "fortunate".

If we train in traditional martial arts to increase our good fortune in case of an attack, while at the same time gaining a healthier body and mental attitude, we have been successful without winning a contest or producing a "loser". Makes sense to me.