

What Do You Have To Brag About Today?

By Susan Ellis

A typical conversation with one of the athletes I coach often starts with “Hey kid, what do you have to brag about today?” Often the brag list is quite long and detailed. This detailed bragging list has been a very important part of the athlete’s growth, not only as an athlete, but as a person. It has allowed him to express and internalize all the good things that happen in his daily life and to gain confidence by expressing it.

Too often we go through the motions of living, training, working, studying, etc. every day without really taking the time to reflect on what we are accomplishing. To know where you are going it helps to take time to reflect where you are coming from, and to recognize all the little baby steps along the way toward reaching your goals.

Strangely, we are schooled by society that bragging is an unacceptable behavior. It is often looked on as conceited and rude. However, in the words of Walt Whitman – “If you done it – it ain’t bragging!” There is a difference in quietly sharing about an accomplishment to a friend, from boasting to the world you have done something or will do something you did not do or are simply not capable of, or bragging about an accomplishment in front of someone you just defeated, or bragging just to put someone else down.

I encourage athletes to tell me about their accomplishments, big and small, as a way to boost their confidence and to get them to recognize they are doing the little things on a daily basis to help them towards their ultimate goal. And I encourage athletes to brag to themselves too – to pat themselves on the back for every little step they achieve, whether it’s finishing an interval with their very best effort, putting in the study hours to get a good mark, or any little thing that was a goal for the day. It is about promoting self-confidence and taking pride in your accomplishments.

If you listen to successful athletes being interviewed they will most often talk about the process that went in to achieving their goals – the daily training, the small improvements on the details they have been working on, the target of accomplishing a goal in a certain area. They will not talk so much about the win itself as about what they put in to their achievement and the pride they took in working hard on the goals they set.

Swim coach Jim Steen holds the NCAA record for longest consecutive national championship streaks in both men's and women's NCAA history in any sport. He coached Kenyon College to 31 consecutive men's and 17 consecutive women's national team championships, and a total of 50 national team titles in all, as well as coaching 300 swimmers to individual All-American honors, all over a 36 year career that is still going on. In this interview Coach Steen talks about having his athletes focus on the process to being successful rather than winning.

Clara Hughes’ journal gives some insight into her confidence and success as an athlete. The journal chronicles many events in her life that influence and impact her, both in

sport and outside sport. I believe the journal is one way for Clara to take the time from being so successful in her hectic world to reflect on why she is, and on the things that matter most to her in life. It allows her to clarify who she is, who she wants to be, and how she gets there. (Note: There are so many great entries in this journal it is hard to pick a favourite but try to read at least a few of them.)

So, go ahead skaters, brag a little to yourself, your coaches, and your best friends. Be careful not to be too cocky or overly boastful, or that will come back to bite you in your tucked butt, but don't be afraid to pat yourself on the back and do it on a daily basis. If you can't find one thing to brag about each day, then you need to reconsider your goals or re-commit to them and get the job done. Start your own brag journal and write out all of your daily accomplishments as well as your hopes, dreams, and goals. The more you write, the more sense of accomplishment you will feel and you will find yourself developing a growing incentive to find even more things to brag about.

So, what do I have to brag about today? Well, I just finished my 99th tip of the month. I think it's a good one and it's one that has helped me to feel a sense of accomplishment, not only that I finished it today, but also knowing it will help an athlete to better understand how to make themselves successful. There, how's that for bragging!

One more to go for the magic 100!