

Praise the talent or the effort?

By Dan McCarthy//National Team High Performance Consultant

Last April, Carol Dweck, the author of the aforementioned study, spoke at the National Team Coaches Conference in Colorado Springs. According to Dweck, the way young athletes are praised can affect their mindset positively (called a growth mindset) or negatively (called a fixed mindset).

Parents and coaches can help develop a growth mindset by praising effort, tactics and persistence, instead of intelligence and natural physical prowess.

Fixed Mindset

Praising achievement can lead to behaviors that hinder development to full potential, even for those with true talent. Dweck feels as if the self-esteem movement of the 1990s, though well intentioned, actually crippled the self-esteem of children. Adolescents who were continually praised for “being so smart,” or congratulated for getting good grades, developed a fixed mindset. With a fixed mindset, children worry about making mistakes and putting forth effort as if it indicated low ability. They avoid struggling to solve test problems or spending extra time working on an athletic skill they have not mastered.

Growth Mindset

Praising children for how hard they worked to earn a grade, or the amount of effort they expended to finally execute a critical part of their race is much more productive for the long-term development. Students and athletes with a growth mindset learn to value the process and the learning experience and do not tie their self-worth to an exam score or a final result. Those with a growth mindset, Dweck feels, embrace labors and seek out counsel which will help them improve. Even when they fail, those with a growth mindset say they will study more or just work harder in the future.