May 29, 2019 - Laurie

Raising 27's

Last Friday night, shortly after 10pm, I sat in my un-started, dark car, looking at my 12-year-old son in the back seat. The light from an overhead street lamp helped me to see that he wasn’t looking back at me. He was staring out the side window in an effort to hide the tears that were slowly falling down his cheeks.

15 minutes earlier, his competitive baseball team had lost BAD to a group of kids who clearly were the offspring of the St. Louis Cardinals. They had really white pants, and more professional looking jerseys, and they could do that thing where they’d tag our guy out at first base AND THEN get our other guy out at third….all in 3 seconds flat. They were wayyyyyy too badass for preteen boys. It wasn’t right.

When the annihilation was finally complete, Aiden walked right past me and headed to the car without saying a word. I was a little pissed, stumbling 25 feet behind him with the rest of my pretzel shoved under one armpit, and both hands full of bleacher chairs and bug spray and sweatshirts.
I loaded up the back, slid into the driver’s seat, and turned around to lecture him about how I’d driven 50 miles for this, and he better watch his attitude and stop ignoring me, etc. And that’s when I saw the tears. And felt the silence. I asked him to tell me what was going on, and after 42 “Nothing-I’m-fine’s” he began to vomit out the most impressive slew of self-pity statements. He told me about what a horrible player he was, and how he would never get any better. He listed each of his mistakes in detail, and then turned on his teammates and pointed out their mistakes as well. Also, the Ump was clearly making bad calls. And the sun was in his eyes. And someone honked their horn two streets over when he was swinging his bat.

It was a very dramatic and carefully crafted tantrum. And when it was over, I watched him settle into a genuine sadness. We drove home in silence; him with his head back on the seat, and his eyes closed. Me white-knuckling it at 10 and 2, silently going to war with myself over exactly when this shittiness had developed in my child. Several hours later, still pining over it under the covers in my pitch-black bedroom, it dawned on me that I had never taught my son how to be a loser.

As a whole, the culture of parenting is almost exclusively aimed at driving our children towards success. Bookstores are full of material directed at improving a child’s performance in all number of categories. Step into a school building, or on to an athletic field and you’ll find the same.

We want our kids to win. And we dedicate an enormous amount of time teaching them exactly how to do it. Look at my Aiden. Up there at the top. He looks good, right? He’s a fantastic winner. He’s extremely athletic, and he’s pro status at receiving compliments, and high-fiving, and tacking “A” papers to our corkboard in the hallway. But what I realized on a dark night in the car with my son, is that so many of us have held winning in such high esteem, that we’ve completely cheated our kids out of the education of losing. Losing WELL.

Do our kids know how to utilize a failure or loss to gain wisdom? To gain strength? To gain perspective?

Can they lose and not feel like a loser? (This is big.)

Can they fail and not feel like a failure? (This is also big.)

If our answer to these questions is “No”, then we have some serious work to do, my friends. Because
the experiences of loss and failure provide far more opportunities for growth, wisdom and strength than an 18-year-old who steps out into the world armed with nothing but a bedroom full of trophies.

And here’s the other kicker that most of us adults already know…..

Nobody becomes successful in life without experiencing loss and failure in some capacity. I don’t care who you are. You failed and lost for a little bit before you got hot and rich. In fact, loss and failure are often the only doors to success. And if we can’t teach our children how to expertly navigate the bad, they won’t have the strength to achieve the good.

Period.

We need our kids to be losers sometimes. It’s vastly important. Character and grit and resilience are only born inside of these experiences. They are NOT born in championship wins, or letters of acceptance, or natural giftedness.

So what does it look like to raise awesome losers? How in the actual world do we do this?

Clearly, I don’t know. I mean, my kid is the one in the backseat being an ass.

But here’s where I started with him the next morning…..

I said “Let’s do something together over the next few months. Whenever we watch any sporting event….whether we’re watching professional sports, or even just watching your brother’s games up at the school…..lets immediately look to the losing team after the game. Everyone else will be paying attention to the winners. But me and you? Let’s look for the losers. Some of them will suck. But if we look hard enough, we’ll find some fantastic ones. Let’s pick out the ones who know how to lose really well. The one’s who still hold their heads up high. The ones who encourage their teammates. Let’s see if any of them actually come over to the winning team and congratulate them. Which ones will still be able to smile, even after they lost? Those people will be our MVL’s. Most Valuable Losers.”

He processed it for a few seconds, and then he actually said the words “You’re on crack cocaine.”

And I said “I know honey. But that’s not the point right now.”
Several nights later he was tooling around with his friends behind the bleachers when my younger son’s team won their game. We didn’t sit together, and my vision of us creepily staring down the losing team didn’t happen the way I’d planned. But on the drive home he randomly turned to me and said, “Number 27.”

“What do you mean?” I said. “What are you talking about?”

“Number 27. From that losing team tonight. He was laughing with his friends in the dugout after the game. And I saw him walk up to one of our guys at the concession stand and tell them they had a good hit. So that’s why I picked 27.”

I smiled at him. But it was too big of a smile, and it maybe lasted a little too long,…and he rolled his eyes at me.

There’s a lot more work to do, but that’s how we’ve started this thing. Looking for the losers.

There are some really great parents out there who are raising awesome winners. Hard-working. Humble. Kind. And this should be celebrated. Make no mistake.

But we need to honor the phenomenal parents who are raising amazing losers. We need to become the parents who are raising 27’s. Because this world needs 27’s so much more than it needs winners pumping their fists in the air.

Who’s with me on this one?

I love you guys.

Laurie

P.S. This morning I dropped the kids off at school, and as they were starting to walk into the building, I rolled the window down and screamed out “Have a great day guys! Go be the LOSERS I know you can be!”

You should’ve seen the looks.