



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE

Olympic Character vs. Olympic Results

Amy Manson is a PCA Trainer and a former track and field All-American at Indiana University, who ran professionally for Nike and qualified for three Olympic Trials at the 5,000-meter and marathon distances.

Watching last night's recap of the Olympics, I was filled with admiration and respect at the beautiful display of character and sportsmanship by Abbey D'Agostino and Nikki Hamlin -- competitors who crashed, then helped each other through the final 2,000 meters of the 5,000-meter qualifying race. I was thankful and proud that these two represented my sport so well and immediately became a fan of both athletes.

It is easy and obvious for me to cheer on Abbey, my fellow Masconomet High School alum. Although we've never met, we share one of those special high school coaches, Joe Casey, who taught us life through sport. But the deeper reason for me to admire both Abbey and Nikki is that these tough, competitive women had the knee-jerk reaction of choosing character, when character and results came head to head.

Last night's coverage then turned to Ryan Lochte, a heavily medaled swimmer, who'd spent a night drinking, vandalizing property, and in order to cover his mischief, lying and defaming the host country, whose people had worked so hard to provide his Olympic experience.

There's an unofficial event going on at the Olympics. It's character vs. results, competing for the prize of support, respect, admiration, fans and opportunity. Guess what, folks, in the long run, character always wins.

Athletes who feel their performance alone entitles them to anything are likely to be disappointed when nothing follows the podium. Winning on the scoreboard or clock only provides a stage to expose and amplify one's character. What is amplified and exposed on that stage is what THEN earns (or loses) the real prize.

Kudos to the Allyson Felixes, the Missy Franklins, the Ashton Eatons and the Simone Manuels of these Olympics, whose inspiring character has been exposed and amplified through their athletic results (whether exhilarating, or in Missy's case, disappointing), earning our unconditional respect, admiration and support whether or not they ever reach a podium again.

My take-away: Character can win without athletic results, but the reverse does not hold. That's a bonus for those who achieve both -- and good news for those of us who will never reach a podium.

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