

# How to Erase the Sting of Losing



Losing stinks.

How's that for an opening line? Heck, I don't even like losing my car keys!

I know a lot of elite level ballers who feel the same way and use their distaste of losing as a major source of motivation.

As much as losing sucks, I do hope we can all agree that losing a basketball game is not the end of the world. As important as basketball is, you have to keep things in perspective. Nevertheless, I still stand by my opening statement--losing stinks.

Now, some of you reading this haven't lost a game this season. And some of you have lost almost every game you've played. However, I imagine a majority of you are somewhere in between.

Whether you are a player or a coach, how you handle a loss and deal with adversity speaks volumes about your character, your competitiveness, your commitment to excellence, and determining whether losing will become a habit or the initial spark that ignites success.

Even though losing is not the end of the world, losing *should* hurt. When you invest an inordinate amount of time, effort, and love into something like the game of basketball, losing should hurt. If it doesn't hurt, then you don't care. And if you don't care, you shouldn't be playing.

However, you can't let it hurt for long. You can't wallow in self pity. You must lick your wounds, learn from the loss, and quickly move past it. If you don't, it will happen again. And it will continue to happen until the reasons you have been losing are corrected.

Losing, like any other setback or failure, should be looked at as a learning experience and a way to grow and improve. It is very important to learn from every loss and use it as a stepping stone to future victory. You don't want to let one loss rattle your team's confidence and snowball into a streak of losses. You need to learn from it and nip it in the bud!

However, in order to learn from it, you must honestly and accurately identify why you lost. In my opinion, there are only three reasons you lose a game:

- You weren't as talented as the other team.
- You didn't execute or make plays.
- You played with a lack of effort.

Determining why you lost is the most important factor when deciding how to handle it and how to bounce back.

If you lost because the other team was more talented, did you still compete? Or did you play scared?

If you lost because you didn't execute or make plays, was it a mental thing (lack of focus)? Or was it just a poor shooting night?

If you lost because you lacked effort and the other team outworked you, was it because...

Scratch that, there is no because. There is never an excuse for playing with a lack of effort. That is absolutely unacceptable. Losing from a lack of effort is the only time you should punish yourself or your players at the next practice. And you should make a statement to make sure it never happens again. Like killing an ant with a sledgehammer.

I can accept and admit when the other team was better. I can accept and admit when we had an off night (poor shooting)... but I cannot and will not accept losing from a lack of effort.

In addition to identifying why you lost, it is equally important to evaluate *how* you lost. Did you show proper sportsmanship to the other team and the officials? Did you play like a team or did you play selfishly, point fingers and make excuses? Obviously no one likes to lose, but it is very important you learn how to handle losses like a professional and with character... not like a petulant child.

We are very strict about this with our players and don't give them an inch when it comes to sportsmanship or playing the blame game. We win together, we lose together. No one player wins a game by his or herself and no one player loses a game either. Missing a shot at the buzzer or throwing the ball away with three seconds left is never what actually loses the game. It was an accumulation of the previous 31 minutes and 57 seconds.

Make sure, as a coach or as a player, you take some time to reflect and evaluate both why you lost and how you lost and use it as a learning experience for your next game as well as for the rest of the season.