

"I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU!"

A Lesson from Clemson Football's Dabo Swinney

Mike Deegan:

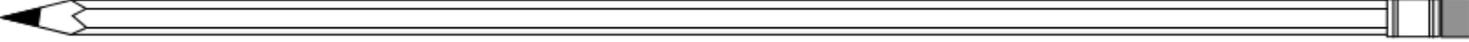
"Life Lessons Learned Through Sports"

Defending National Champion and the current 2nd ranked Clemson Tigers lost 27-24 to the Syracuse Orangemen. Many people would call this a "devastating loss." The likelihood of Clemson having the opportunity to defend their title is unlikely. In addition, we must remember that major college football is a business. The Clemson football program is valued at close to a billion dollars. The pressure of winning every week, pleasing a fan base with unrealistic expectations, and dealing with administration has to be daunting for the Tigers Head Coach Dabo Swinney. That is why his immediate reaction to the set-back was incredible. First, during the post-game encounter with the Orange's Dino Babers you could see him say, "I'm so happy for you." If that wasn't enough, Dabo went into the Syracuse locker room and congratulated the Orange players. We can learn a lot about the character of a person in high-leverage situations. Coach Dabo answered the bell.

Dabo provided us with a great example of how to display class in a loss. Many coaches and leaders, myself included, will be forced to analyze their behavior following a set-back. With that being said, I'd like to explore deeper what it takes to be gracious in defeat. In my opinion, this wasn't an "in the moment" response by Coach Dabo; instead, this response was from years of internal work. Anyone can muster up an "eyes down" congratulation handshake but genuine happiness is different. Here are a few things to consider.

- 1. Maturity** – Leadership Coach Rod Olson says, "immaturity at its core, is only thinking about yourself all the time." Maturity would require just the opposite, thinking about others. If we are so wrapped up in ourselves, it is impossible for us to appreciate the joy and happiness others are experiencing. Dabo displayed amazing maturity by being able to recognize a special moment for a coaching colleague. He was able to pause and reflect that Coach Babers and the Orange have been through a lot over the last several years. That their win against Clemson was an accumulation of hard work, sacrifice, and set-backs. Dabo had the maturity to think of others in that moment.



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2. **Competition** – Somewhere along the line we have been taught that competing requires an adversarial relationship. It's either I win, or I lose. The Latin definition of *competition* is, "to strive together." Brett Ledbetter from, *What Drives Winning*, challenges us to view competition as a partnership. Just like a boxer cannot get better without a great sparring partner, a team cannot reach their pinnacle without elite competition. Clemson's sparring partner, Syracuse won on Friday night. Why wouldn't you be happy for someone you have trained with over the years?
 3. **Self-Worth** – From everything I have read, Dabo is a person of faith. He knows that wins and championships do not define his existence. If you check the Clemson fan message boards, you can be sure that some fans are FURIOUS with Dabo." Did you see him hugging the other coach?" "He didn't even care we lost." "Instead of congratulating the other team he should have been screaming at his team." Coach Swinney "gets it." He knows that a loss (or a win for that matter) is nothing more than an opportunity to learn. Why make it more than it really is?
 4. **Presence** – In high-leverage moments it is easy to let your mind race. "There goes the hopes of a title." "I let everyone down." "What will my boss think." "I'm going to get fired." Dabo could have let all his thoughts about the future impact his present decision making. Instead of projecting into the future, he had the ability to stay present which allowed him to authentically enjoy the special moment for Coach Babers and the Orange. As I write this, my guess is Dabo is now on to the next present moment task, whether that is having breakfast with his wife, breaking down film or connecting with an athlete.

Can you be better when things don't go your way? Can you be better in defeat? Most people will see this as a lack of competitive spirit or toughness. Let's be better than that. Dabo Swinney is the coach of a National Champion; his graciousness in defeat does not make him "less of a man" or less of a competitor. It just means he's a human who has an amazing ability to enjoy the success of others. What a great gift.

