



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Envision success

When the batter steps up to the plate, there are so many things that could go wrong. The sun could block his view. Lack of concentration could make him slow to react to a 98-mph fastball. The pitcher could lose his grip, hurling the ball toward the batter rather than the strike zone. Even blinking at the wrong time could mean the difference between a home run and slicing air. But those are not the thoughts of a slugger. Before he steps to the plate, he swings in slow motion, envisioning the crack of the bat and the ball sailing over the wall or dropping into that perfect slot in the outfield.

Practiced at handling adversity

As the gymnast waits her turn at the corner of the mat, her head bobs and her eyes sketch out a path as she postures mini-movements of her routine. She's trying to arouse muscle memory, the announcer explains, so that when the officials give her the signal to go, her whole body will remember and perform the routine just as she practiced it thousands of times.

She doesn't envision failure; that's not what she wants her muscles to remember. She envisions her routine as it is supposed to be — flawless.

Practice a routine or a race to perfection, though, and things still go wrong. A bicycle gets a flat tire. A muscle cramps after the starting gun sounds the start of the race. Goggles fill with water.

How a competitor prepares for competition determines to a large extent how he or she will physically and mentally handle adversity when it happens.

Michael Phelps practiced enough and his coach included enough "problems" in his practice routine that water-filled goggles didn't prevent him from earning an Olympic gold medal in Beijing in 2008. Even though he couldn't see the wall, he knew how many strokes it took him to get from one end of the pool to the other. We learned later that Phelps' coach had actually stepped on a pair of goggles in practice so that he would have experience reacting to the equipment malfunction. It wasn't his first lap around the pool blind.

I doubt that was the way he envisioned earning that gold medal, but assuredly he did not let a little adversity get in the way of letting him swim the race he envisioned.

A different type of competition

As we walked the halls at the National Junior Angus Show in Louisville, Ky., the same scenario played out — though in a

different context. Cook-off contestants practiced their skits, speakers walked through their presentation and showmen mentally steeled themselves for their showmanship heat.

Some envisioned winning one of the varied contests at the NJAS; some envisioned placing well in their class in the cattle show; and some envisioned meeting new friends. The confidence and sheer enjoyment of being at the event and competing is wonderful to witness.

Challenges ranging from misplaced show halters to the roof blowing off the hotel happen, but we know we have a junior program worth supporting when they can adapt to adversities they never saw coming with a smile.

In the end, the athletes of the past echo each other in saying that it was not the final standing but being a part of that competitive spirit — that pursuit of perfection, of being the best — that was memorable.

If you envision failure, you never step up to the plate to swing the bat. If you envision success, every experience, even a loss, becomes part of the practice routine that yields success.

"In a League of Their Own" in Louisville, Ky., our junior members hit it out of the park.

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