



Outside the Box

► by **Tom Field**, professor of animal science, Colorado State University

Exploring the concept of winning

It seemed as if the entire country came to a standstill for five days as Australia battled it out with New Zealand in cricket. Each and every conversation was begun, punctuated by and completed with a passionate discussion of the match.

Competing to win

After several days, even as a cricket novice, I began to get into the spirit of the event. The tension and excitement came to a crescendo on Day 5 with the two teams battling it out, neither able to gain the momentum. And then it was over — the final score even and the result a draw.

I nearly lost all decorum. How was it possible that a game could go on for five days without determining a winner? Even World Cup soccer finds a way to determine a winner in the more important games.

The experience left me wondering about the notion of winning. How could players and fans so gracefully leave all that unfinished business? Most sports provide a venue in which a team or individual emerges victorious. Preparation, dedication, effort and skill typically determine the winner of an event in which all parties play by the rules. There are times when fate, luck or happenstance intervenes to affect the outcome, but nonetheless, at the end of the day, a winner is declared.

It once seemed that winning was a simple concept determined by a final score, but my experiences in life lead me to believe that winning is something deeper than the outcome of a single event. Winning is a philosophy about how individuals and organizations define victory and how they conduct their lives and businesses to achieve that end. While there are cases of folks who take the desire to win too far and move beyond the boundaries of fair play in a 'win at all cost' mentality, the vast majority of us compete to win under the social contract of sportsmanship and common courtesy.

Public vs. private victories

Life is a competitive experience in many respects, and success is measured both publicly and privately. The public venue often measures winning in quantifiable formats — championships, revenue and awards that originate from external sources

in recognition of individual or organizational accomplishment. The public victory is valuable for engagement and motivation, but it is not fully capable of defining the art of winning.

The private victory is founded on the internal framework by which we measure progress toward a predetermined goal or objective and the set of values that determines our satisfaction with the means by which we achieve those objectives. Interestingly, private victories do not require public recognition for validation. However, public victories not accompanied by private victory are bereft of meaning.

As the summer show season draws to a close, a number of public victories have rightfully been recognized — class winners, divisional champions and grand champions. However, it is also important to give pause to the countless number of private victories that have been attained. The list is deeply personal and occurs in the form of accumulated experience, maturity and wisdom that ultimately changes people. Private victories might include the following.

- 1) Completing daily chores each and every day.
- 2) Keeping a smile while standing outside the winner's circle.
- 3) Persevering, even when the heifer won't stand still.
- 4) Possessing the grace to congratulate higher-placing award recipients.
- 5) Developing the determination to work hard to excel at higher levels in the future.
- 6) Contributing to the success of others through courtesy and cooperation.
- 7) Winning a class and shaking the hands of other competitors while offering words of encouragement.
- 8) Learning from every experience — both good and bad.
- 9) Developing the conscientious approach of the stockman.

- 10) Feeling the sense of pride that comes from giving our best effort, regardless of the judge's decision.

While public victories offer moments of intense excitement, the shine on the trophy eventually fades. Private victories create the lasting essence of character.

Winning in the beef industry is also measured in public and private arenas. Average sale prices, Pathfinder Cow awards, Web site hits, consumer demand and public support for agriculture are external signs of success. However, each of these wins is predicated by a series of personal victories attained by a multitude of people along the beef industry production and supply chain.

The choices we make create the destiny we will experience both individually and as an industry. Long-term profitability is built by the promises we make and keep. Beef quality assurance (BQA) is a format in which we promise our customers that we have done everything humanly possible to produce a safe and wholesome food product. A registration certificate is a promise to our customers that breeding stock are parentage-verified and that meaningful data has been collected and reported to create a reliable system of genetic evaluation.

The integrity of the industry depends on the character of its people. And winning streaks depend on our commitment to achieving private victories each and every day as the foundation for the public victories that we seek.

E-MAIL: tom.field@colostate.edu

Editor's Note: Tom Field is a professor at the Colorado State University (CSU) Department of Animal Sciences, where he is responsible for the seedstock cattle breeding program of the university teaching herd. He directs the Seedstock Merchandising Team and teaches Food Animal Sciences, Beef Production and Family Ranching. He is a contributor to the research efforts of the CSU Beef-Tec program. A frequent speaker at beef cattle events in the United States and internationally, Field is also a partner in his family's commercial cow-calf enterprise, which uses Angus as an important genetic component.