



# When Your Child Fails in the Clutch

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“My 8-year-old failed in a clutch situation near the end of a game, eliminating our team from a tournament. How can I help him get over his disappointment?”**

## PCA Response by Ray Lokar, PCA Trainer—Los Angeles

Among the greatest values sports can offer youth are lessons in resiliency and “grit.” Too often, we parents try to protect our children from the very moments that can build these qualities.

To capitalize on the teachable moment, a great first step is helping our children understand the courage required even to face that clutch situation and try their best. Help them understand that in team sports, no single player loses (or wins) a game alone. It is a great life lesson in teamwork to realize that the player who makes the last out of a baseball game may feel worse, but that there were 17 other outs made that contributed to the end result.

Dealing with these disappointments by focusing on the process rather than the outcome helps players understand that in sports, as in the rest of life, sometimes you can do everything “right” and still not get the desired result. And that even then, you can take pride in your effort.

A player may have a great at-bat, work the count, hit the ball hard and still fall victim to great defense. “Failing” in a clutch opportunity prepares players for the next time they are in the situation.

There are a lot of “failures” in sports in the form of strikeouts, errors, missed shots, fumbles, losses and poor seasons. If players learn from these (guided by parents who are intent on youth taking life lessons from sports), they can use the setback as motivation to improve technique. These experiences all become building blocks in their character and help build the resiliency and grit needed to succeed at anything.

My oldest daughter played multiple sports in her youth, I got to coach her a bunch, and she went on to play college basketball at the University of Redlands. Early in her career, as a really good shooter with limited playing time, she was routinely inserted at the end of close games to try to score – and missed a TON of shots.

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## When Your Child Fails in the Clutch, continued

But she kept shooting. By the time she was a senior she was a clutch performer and MADE a bunch of important shots down the stretch of some big games. I'm convinced she wouldn't have made those if she hadn't missed the others earlier.

This was never put into better perspective for me than the day she graduated with her Doctorate in Physical Therapy. I asked her about the long and difficult journey and she said, "I don't think I could have done it if it weren't for shooting slumps and losing streaks."

THAT'S what navigating the disappointments in sports does to help create "Better Athletes, Better People."

*Ray Lokar has coached a variety of sports for over 25 years at the youth, high school, and college levels, including his son and two daughters who have gone on to play college athletics, as well as an 8-year old son playing youth sports. Ray was the Head Basketball Coach of the 2002 California Interscholastic Federation Champions while at Bishop Amat High School and is a Past-President of the Southern California Interscholastic Basketball Coaches Association.*

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