Thank you, Shaun White, for not medaling in the Olympics

By Shannan Younger, February 12, 2014

Shaun White was the favorite to take home the gold in the men's halfpipe competition at the Sochi Olympics. But he did not win. In fact, he did not get any hardware as he finished in fourth place, just off the medal stand.

While I'm saddened by Shaun White not medaling, I'm grateful that my tween could learn many valuable lessons from the American snowboarder in his defeat. Here are some of the important lessons I hope my tween takes away from Shaun White's fourth place finish.

You don't always win
It is a tough fact of life that sometimes you do your best, and it just isn't good enough. It's heartbreaking, but it happens all the time. In this age of giving kids a trophy, ribbon or medal for absolutely everything, the reality of not winning everything can be a tough realization.

That said, it's not like he really lost. He made it to the freaking Olympics. It's hard to see an Olympian as a loser. Well, maybe not hard for some or the Shaun White haters, but hard for me. The three American women who were the first to compete in the women's ski jumping competition are absolutely winners in my mind, regardless of the fact that they did not medal.

Being a good sport matters
Right after his last run, which didn't go well, he hugged Iouri Podladtchikov. And it seemed like a real hug, not a half-hearted "the cameras are on so I better fake it" hug. When the commentator interviewed him right after that, one of the first things he said was, "I'm happy for the guys who did well." He was gracious and seemed sincere. Sometimes tweens, who are by the nature of development self-centered, find it hard to rejoice in the success of others. Being happy for someone who beat you is tough, no doubt, but White shows that it is possible. He was a good sport, and sportsmanship matters.
He didn’t give up
In the same interview, White said, "It just wasn't my day. I'll live on to fight another one. . . . Next time." I like the message that one bad day doesn't mean you're not good at something; it simply means you had a bad day. Everyone, including a former gold medalist, has a bad day every now and then.
As Robert Green Ingersoll said, "The greatest test of courage on earth is to bear defeat without losing heart."

He asked for a hug
After the competition, White said to the friend, "Come here, man. I need a hug." I love that he was able to ask his friend for a hug. I suspect that not all male athletes (or myself, a female couch potato, for that matter) can do that.

The agony of defeat is never easy to take, but having friends who support you no matter what makes it much, much easier. Finding those friends is not easy, certainly as a tween, but it's something to shoot for. When the going gets tough, you find out who your friends are, and they give you a hug.

When the Flying Tomato came on the scene, I didn't see him as a parenting ally. While I'm sad that his Olympics didn't go as he had hoped, I'm grateful for the teachable moments he provided.

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper. The first two questions can be answered in 1-2 sentences. The third/ fourth questions needs a full-page, well thought out response.

1. Who is the intended audience for this article, and how do you know that?
2. What was the author’s purpose for writing this article, and how do you know that?
3. The following line from the article makes a statement about our society. Do you think this statement is true? And what are your opinions about it? “In this age of giving kids a trophy, ribbon or medal for absolutely everything”
4. In what positive ways did Shaun White react to his losses?