

## No More Participation Award

“I’ve grown most not from victories, but setbacks. If winning is God’s reward, then losing is how he teaches us” (Williams). Serena Williams is one of the best, if not, the best female tennis player in the world. She has dealt with both wins and losses, but she says that what really helped her strive was her defeats and struggles because they helped to push her to work harder to get to that next level that she wanted. The losses made her determined. Just like Williams, today's generation of children should get to have that same opportunity. The opportunity of setbacks and real losses, but what kids end up with now are fake victories that overshadow their real losses. Whether it is a math team meet or a football game, this generation of children have been negatively affected physically, mentally, and emotionally throughout their activities. They have been given participation awards, these so-called awards have also affected the activity and the way that it is viewed. The participation award should not be given out throughout all activities because it will negatively impact both the game and its players.

Throughout both kids and adults, when given a participation award for something they have done, it can negatively impact their emotions. Recently from a 2018 article, Psychologist Dr. Mike Ronsisvalle tells a story about his kid’s basketball team and how they had lost with a score of 27-28. The team was given participation trophies and on the car ride home his son asked him why they even gave him an award when they lost. At first, the dad didn’t know how to respond because he didn’t know why they gave them out. He later mentions, “I’m not sure why the organizers gave trophies to all the participants, but my hunch is that they were trying to make

sure that the kids who lost still felt valuable and special. In the process, they probably did a disservice to my son and the rest of his teammates” (Ronsisvalle). This is an injustice towards these kids because they are getting an insincere prize when they know that they have already lost. Just recently on March 7th, I had played a section finals girls basketball game. We ended up just barely losing to a team that we know we could have beaten. Everyone on the team was devastated and we were all heading up to the locker room, then we got stopped. None of us wanted to be on the court at that moment, but we had to line up on the court as we each got medals even though we had lost. Four girls on the team immediately took them off and our coach gave his away. I can say that these medals did not make anything better, it only reminded us of the sad loss we just had and that we weren’t good enough to get the real thing. My team was Mike’s team. In the end, any player or participant receiving a participation award can ultimately end up more emotionally distressed than they would without one. More often than not, giving participation awards can impact the participant’s emotions negatively with sadness, disappointment, and can lead to being disheartened.

Players tend to decline physically in their activities after receiving participation awards. For example, in an article called *Should We Give Our Kids Participation Trophies*, a psychologist, Jonathan Fader Ph.D., says, “Countless studies have shown that we’re more committed to an activity when we do it out of passion, rather than an external reward such as a trophy... Kids are smart, and they know that being handed a participation trophy isn’t the same as winning” (Fader). It has been presented that kids physically show commitment when they do something because they like it, not for an award. Moreover, in the article *Let’s Analyze Effects of Participation Awards*, Dr. Chris Stankovich says, “Teach kids to devalue hard work and always

expect to be rewarded. This assertion implies that by rewarding undeserving kids, you will eventually turn them into lazy adults who expect to be rewarded for no effort” (Stankovich). Though he says that it would probably never be that extreme but that it goes to an extent in people where they can turn these bad habits into their regular lifestyle. By giving out participation awards the people participating in these events can begin to not value improving and eventually realize that they do not have to do much and still get that feeling of being rewarded. For example, if a team loses but still gets rewarded the team can end up feeling that what they had ‘accomplished’ was enough because ultimately, in the end, they were rewarded. Participation awards could lead to people no longer physically, and even mentally pushing themselves to improve because they feel as if they are fine.

People’s mental state growing up can change and lead to problems later in life if given participation awards. One's mental state has the power to shape itself over time and begin to affect how a person responds. According to Evan Grossman in *How Participation Trophies are Making Our Kids Soft*, “Studies have shown that rewarding kids just for participating can have a negative impact, producing a self-obsessed, irresponsible, and unmotivated generation of false achievers” (Grossman). This article exposes the fact that people can be mentally impacted poorly when given these types of awards. It explains that the generations that receive these can ultimately end up being unmotivated and still feel as if they deserve something. One study, *Participation Trophies - “Special” or “Harmful”*, shows the pros and cons of receiving participation awards. The article talks about one of the negatives saying, “The trophy actually takes away the motivation to improve... it keeps kids from feeling frustration and experiencing failure. The experts (researchers, psychiatrists, and doctors) in the segment say this is doing our

kids no favors. When they get to college/work and struggle, they are more likely to give up than dig in” (Belau). By getting these types of awards your mind can change and create a fake sense of accomplishment that you begin to accept. This can lead to problems, not only in the sports or activities done, but also in their future; their jobs, their families, and their problem-solving skills. All of these things can end up being affected poorly if new generations continue to be showered with awards that are not won. Mentally, athletes or receivers of such awards, are more likely to struggle future-wise than those who do not obtain these false awards.

Giving out participation awards can change the way the sport or activity is seen or played. In this article, an athlete, Betty Berdan, talks about her experiences with her countless number of participation awards. She says, “They do not mean much to me because I know that identical awards sit in other children’s rooms all over town and probably in millions of other homes across the country” (Berdan). Knowing the fact that everyone else is also getting the same ‘awards’ around the world does not make any kid feel special through receiving it. She also mentions, “Trophies for all convey an inaccurate and potentially dangerous life message to children: We are all winners” (Berdan). Any game or activity that is being done competitively ends up with a winner and a loser, that is what makes it competitive. We cannot all be winners. When someone has lost, they know that they have lost. Betty said, “Trophies should be given out for first, second and third; participation should be recognized, but celebrated with words and a pat on the back rather than a trophy” (Berdan). This method had been used for a long time and it rewarded the people who earned it, though now in almost every activity there are awards for just being there. It’s not bad at all to encourage participation, but by doing it with words and a pat can have a better effect than it would with a trophy. Many times people only need someone to

give them help, constructive criticism, praise, or even just a hug. Giving out these awards can be detrimental towards the sport or activity played.

Participation awards can be considered the main culprit of the poorly affected players and games. All of this research presents that there are many negatives to these awards. Many of these people who receive this 'award' are held back from what they could truly accomplish physically, mentally, and emotionally by a piece of metal that's going to collect dust in the corner of a room. Getting rid of participation awards and leaving people with brutal losses, hurdles, disadvantages, and obstacles can help push most anyone to their greatest potential. Many athletes like Serena Williams, students, and parents all agree that participation awards are not a necessity in games, activities, and life whereas they can also harm the participant in many ways. Now, please ask yourself, "do we really need these participation awards?"

Word Count: 1497

## Bibliography:

- Belau, Katherine, et al. "Participation Trophies - 'Special' or 'Harmful.'" *Character and Leadership*, 11 July 2017,  
[www.characterandleadership.com/participation-trophies-special-or-harmful/](http://www.characterandleadership.com/participation-trophies-special-or-harmful/).
- Berdan, Betty. "Should Every Young Athlete Get a Trophy?" *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 2016,  
[www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/10/06/should-every-young-athlete-get-a-trophy/participation-trophies-send-a-dangerous-message](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/10/06/should-every-young-athlete-get-a-trophy/participation-trophies-send-a-dangerous-message).
- Fader, Jonathan. "Should We Give Our Kids Participation Trophies?" *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 2014,  
[www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-new-you/201806/should-we-give-our-kids-participation-trophies](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-new-you/201806/should-we-give-our-kids-participation-trophies).
- Grossman, Evan. "How Participation Trophies Are Making Our Kids Soft." *Men's Journal*, 4 Dec. 2017,  
[www.mensjournal.com/adventure/how-participation-trophies-are-making-our-kids-soft-20150725/](http://www.mensjournal.com/adventure/how-participation-trophies-are-making-our-kids-soft-20150725/).
- "Overjustification Effect and the Felt Tip Marker Study." *Explorable - Think Outside The Box - Research, Experiments, Psychology, Self-Help*, [explorable.com/overjustification-effect](http://explorable.com/overjustification-effect).
- Ronsisvalle, Mike. "Ronsisvalle: 3 Reasons Participation Trophies Are Harmful." *Florida Today*,

Florida Today, 25 Sept. 2018,

[www.floridatoday.com/story/life/wellness/2018/09/25/ronsisvalle-3](http://www.floridatoday.com/story/life/wellness/2018/09/25/ronsisvalle-3)

[-reasons-participation-trophies-bad/1419776002/](http://www.floridatoday.com/story/life/wellness/2018/09/25/ronsisvalle-3-reasons-participation-trophies-bad/1419776002/).

Stankovich, Chris. "Let's Analyze Effects of Participation Awards." *ThisWeek Community News*,

*ThisWeek Community News*, 13 Jan. 2017,

[www.thisweeknews.com/content/stories/sports/2017/01/12/the-sports-doc.html](http://www.thisweeknews.com/content/stories/sports/2017/01/12/the-sports-doc.html).

Williams, Serena. "Top 20 Serena Williams Quotes to Inspire You to Rise Up and Win."

*Goalcast*,

8 Aug. 2017,

[www.goalcast.com/2017/08/08/top-20-serena-williams-quotes-to](http://www.goalcast.com/2017/08/08/top-20-serena-williams-quotes-to)

[-inspire-you-to-rise-up-win/](http://www.goalcast.com/2017/08/08/top-20-serena-williams-quotes-to-inspire-you-to-rise-up-win/).