

Lesson Twelve

Competition

LESSON IDEA

Competition is an essential ingredient in the free enterprise system. It works automatically to see that we get better goods at lower prices, and to reward those who have earned it.

VISUAL AID

None recommended for this lesson.

ONCE UPON A TIME in Daydream, the capital city of a country called Utopia, there was an outstanding baseball team. Yet at the beginning of the season, few thought that it would do very well, since it had a new coach, no star players, and had lost most of its games the season before.

But this year was different. The Hopefuls (as the team was called) barely won its first game, in extra innings, by a score of 3 to 2. It led all the way in its second game, winning 5 to 1. Its opponents were held scoreless in the next three games. The sixth game, like the first, went into extra innings, but again the Hopefuls won when, with two out in the bottom of the 13th, a pinch-hitter for the pitcher hit a bloop single with a man on third.

And so it went throughout the season. Incredibly, when it was over, the Hopefuls had gone undefeated to easily win the city championship. The team then captured the regional title and, in yet another extra-inning contest, prevailed in the final game of the national championship by a score of 9 to 8 to complete a four-game sweep.

The residents of Daydream could hardly contain themselves. Their underdog team had miraculously completed a perfect season! Thousands of fans lined the streets to welcome the team home. The mayor presented the manager with a key to the city. Politicians had their photographs taken with team members.

The legislator who represented the district where the Hopefuls' top hitter lived even proposed a bill in Congress proclaiming the team to be the best ever, and suggesting that since it was so

good, it should never have to play another game. "After all," he said, "haven't these players already proven they are the best? Why should they have to prove it again?"

To the surprise of those who do not understand how Congress sometimes works, the ludicrous bill passed, and the Hopefuls were officially declared the everlasting champions of baseball.

THE TEAM TOURED the nation, meeting fans, speaking in schools, riding in parades, opening fairs, and visiting hospitals. Everywhere the team went, its members were welcomed, cheered, and invited to lavish banquets. For more than three months, they did virtually everything but keep in shape to play baseball.

Then one day, during a visit in the countryside, the Hopefuls were invited to play an exhibition game with a local high school team. Needless to say, no one thought the high schoolers could compete with the national champs. But the Hopefuls had not practiced or played for nearly 12 weeks, and it soon became obvious that something was wrong. They couldn't buy a hit, the center fielder dropped a simple pop fly that cost two runs, the starting pitcher walked five high schoolers in a row at one point, and the infield committed three errors during the first four innings. When it was over, the high school team had embarrassed their renowned competitors by a lop-sided score of 8 to 3.

Everyone was shocked at the result, and couldn't imagine what had happened to the Hopefuls. What do you think explains their pitiful performance?

[Encourage answers until all agree that the lack of competition leading up to the game had hurt the team.] Can you imagine any team that could remain the same, much less improve, without the competition of playing other teams on a regular basis? Why is competition so essential to athletic achievement? Is practice alone enough?

