



HILTON COLLEGE

*A letter from*

# The Head

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Dear Parents

Winning - we need to talk

We are enjoying a purple patch with our sporting results. This is no accident. It is as a result of a well-structured programme with dedicated and gifted sports coaches, teachers and the support structure that enables all boys to grow and develop. It is a privilege to be a part of this success.

However...

We must keep perspective; I speak as an educator.

Sport in school is about so much more than the winning. It is about developing a set of life skills to be mastered both on and off the field. We play to develop the understanding of team; we play to develop grit and perseverance; we play to learn the joy of practise and execution; we play to express our talents and to develop them; we play to enjoy the camaraderie of teammates; we play to win but we *may not* play to win at all costs...and when we lose - life carries on. Even Liverpool knows this...

Schoolboy sport must be exactly that - schoolboy sport. It may not become more than that - ever - then we will have indeed 'lost the plot'.

There will be matches that we lose through no fault of our own: the opponents may be better; marginal calls may go the other way; a crucial kick or flick or catch or shot may be missed. It is irrelevant in the greater scheme of life - especially at school boy level.

I am concerned when the adults (here read *parents*) at the side of the field are blinded by their passion for their son's success such that the result (here read *winning*) becomes the only important outcome.

At this stage in a boy's development, focussing exclusively on winning can stifle creativity on the field, it can dent self-confidence, it can rob a boy of the enjoyment of the game. As a team and as individuals, boys need very little, if any, extrinsic motivation to win and to do well - we are hardwired to be competitive. When extrinsic pressure mounts we need to be very careful that our over-zealous encouragement is not counter productive.

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Winning a particular game in a particular season on a particular field will not define one's education, nor will it define one's future.

The winter sports season always brings tremendous support and this is welcomed and celebrated. Watching your son run on to the pitch as part of a team of young men determined to execute what they have been practising for weeks against old rivals is a fantastic aspect of how we do schooling in South Africa, and in particular boys' schooling. We must protect this aspect of our unique experience and, therefore, we must maintain the right perspective.

I recently read one of our Grade 10 English set-work books: *The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown, which describes the early life's journey of Joe Rantz, as he grows up enduring struggle and trauma (including being 'abandoned' by his parents at age fifteen), his subsequent discovery of Rowing as a sport, through to his being a part of the *USA Eight* that won Gold at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

This achievement came through significant learning for each individual and for the team. A rowing *Eight* succeeds or fails as a collective, it cannot function any other way. The *Eight* lost a few races and had to learn how to bounce back to become the crew that won Olympic Gold that year. They were particularly good and in the final race they rowed with one of their crew members ill, but they refused to allow their coach to substitute him; they had been through so much together they weren't going to let him not be there at the final race. They were prepared to risk losing in order to remain the team that began the journey together.

Team, and all it represented to them, was stronger than the medal. Their coach had instilled in them the notion that, "It has to matter to you whether he wins the race, not just whether you do."

We play to learn, to grow, to thrive, to celebrate our being young and able, to build our life-long friendships.

Playing well is our aim; winning is a bonus. Schoolboy sport is just that!

Sincerely

George