

There is nothing like standing in the middle of a mat after the fight of your life and having a referee raise your hand in the air. With adrenaline still pumping through your veins, you feel a rush of satisfaction as you realize that every struggle, every setback, every moment spent on the mat was worth it.

But while winning is the ultimate goal in any competitive sport, it may not always provide the best lessons. Sometimes, in losing, a fire is lit and it is the driving force a competitor needs to take his or her game to the next level, so that next time, success will be well within reach. But whatever the outcome, competition will make you a better, more focused, more determined athlete.

In my own experience, competition has pushed me to battle not only against my opponents, but also against myself. In that battle, whether I win or lose, I answer every question and doubt I had about my skills, talents, and confidence. Was I prepared physically and mentally for this fight? Did I stay calm and focused under pressure? When I win, what did I do well, and with what did I struggle? When I lose, what areas need improvement so I can be successful in the future?

Competitive training has taught me to focus in preparation for a tournament and reflect on it after, carefully deducing what happened in those few short minutes on the mat, drawing conclusions about my strengths and weaknesses, and where to go from here. I have learned to control nerves, emotions, and negativity, which has certainly also translated into other areas of my life, making me a more confident and determined person in work and play. The benefits of competition and competitive training have been innumerable in my own life, transcending jiu jitsu and exceeding every expectation I had about what I was capable of on and off the mat.

While tournaments, training, wins, and losses are important facets of competition, to me, it is secondary to the sense of community and camaraderie we develop with one another through the hours of excruciating workouts we collectively endure. We are a family, and we push each other to work harder than the day before, to think more critically, and to be better than we thought we could be. When one member of the team wins, our Professors, coaches, and teammates all share in that victory, and whether it is my win, or my teammate's, that victory is sweet.