

What Not to Do to Be a Champion

What makes a champion? Heck, there are a million answers...

Over the years though, I've noticed patterns of thinking that stop people from becoming champions. Yes, I know that's not the question—but answering it this way gives us something solid to work from.

Take a look—do any of these sound like you?

1. **“If you keep doing what you always do you will get something different.”** Einstein once said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” In training, if something's not working—take note or a video, then start varying how and where you do it. ‘Varied Adaptation’ and ‘Varied Application’ are key to high performance.
2. **“I know what feels wrong before I truly know what feels right.”** In early learning, we notice only fragments of a trick. With time, successful execution includes many nuanced details. Keep exploring different variations to broaden your understanding and mastery.
3. **“Success is when I hit the trick.”** Freestyle success isn't just hitting a trick—it's achieving component parts too. Learn to reflect on partial wins and build from there. This accelerates learning more than people realise.
4. **“Right and Wrong.”** One of the most frustrating ideas. Freestyle is constantly evolving—what was once ‘wrong’ may now be the foundation of new tricks. Replace “Right/Wrong” with “Useful/Not Useful (Right Now).”
5. **“Good and Bad.”** Labelling sides as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ limits progress. This usually stems from not training both sides equally. Change the belief: “I can perform equally well both sides.” Challenge the thoughts that hold you back.
6. **“If I paddle hard and long, I'll get better.”** Maybe. But *deliberate practice*—working with intention, planning, reviewing—leads to faster improvement. Remember: **Review is the most powerful part.** Reflection is where performance transforms.
7. **“In competition, I'll just turn up the aggression or humour.”** This is a survival strategy (fight/flight/freeze) and it rarely works. Fight = too much power and chaos. Flight = disengagement. Freeze = paralysis. Instead, centre yourself—breathe, reflect, reset.
8. **“Maximal is optimal.”** Nope. Freestyle is about the *right* amount of energy. For example, try varying stroke power in a McNasty—sometimes 60% hits where 80% fails. **Optimal beats maximal.**
9. **Mirroring.** Watch out for copying the mindset or energy of others. Champions stay proactive and self-anchored. Use visual anchors—a person on the bank with calm posture and presence—to keep your centre.
10. **Living in the past or future, instead of NOW.** Past wins/losses can influence your state—positively or negatively. Future thinking can motivate, but performance happens in the present. You must return to the *now* to deliver.

 *Adapt, Grow – Own It*