

Australia's 'disappointing' results

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As triathlete Erin Densham reminded us in London, success can be measured in far more than just gold. Thaddaeus Zoltkowski

The tears, the laments, the massive sadness over Australia's 'disappointing' performance at the Olympics. Drew Ginn of the Oarsome Foursome looked so very disappointed at his team's second place finish, almost as disappointed as Emily Seebohm, who was so distressed that she might have let her family and country down with her silver medal performance that she was in tears.

What pressure we put on our athletes to perform, so much pressure that they are crushed by a second or third place performance. In his book *Winning*, sociologist Francesco Duina argues that the American obsession with winning is not about winning or losing itself. It is about affirming their place in the world. A similar dynamic exists here. So when we lose, the message we are receiving is that our global position is insecure.

Of course, this is not really the case. But having these feelings of worth tied up in winning makes coming second fraught. A reframing is needed. It is an amazing accomplishment to come second, third, or even fourth in the world in your field. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Yes, strive to win, but also recognize that a slightly lower placing is still worth celebrating. That we could situate silver and bronze medals as failures is a shame.

A lesson could be learned from women's triathlon Olympic bronze medallist Erin Densham. Densham led for much of the run, only being beaten in the last few hundred metres. Nevertheless, she was seemingly thrilled with her performance, describing her hard road to being selected for the Olympics team, and her amazing effort during the event. Her bronze was a triumph, not a loss.