

Trophies for Merit, not Effort

In the article, NFL player James Harrison gave back his two sons' participation trophies from a local athletics event. He posted his reasoning: "these trophies will be given back until they EARN a real trophy. [I believe] that everything in life should be earned and [nobody is] entitled to something just because they tried their best cause sometimes your best is not enough." This stirred up the controversy regarding trophies and children, with some parents thinking participation worthy of a trophy while others disagree.

I agree with Harrison: I believe that trophies come with merit, not effort. It's usually true that with effort comes achievement; in a world where nearly everyone tries, however, it's not reasonable to give recognition to everyone but only to the outstanding ones. This is especially true of participation, which only implies involvement in an event, not a "win in and of itself," like some parents believe. Harrison said he would not give his children that false sense of accomplishment just for participation; if their "best is not enough," then they would be motivated to try harder for that win and for that trophy. This creates a virtuous circle that keeps everyone motivated: the people with the trophies to continue trying their best, and the people who do not to continue trying harder. On the other hand, giving trophies for participation would only create a vicious cycle of false achievements. Although trophies can be used as an incentive for participation, the first step towards achievement, they are meant to motivate and show hard work; the children should go through great efforts to obtain them, not be automatically entitled to them. Trophies are supposed to be special trinkets given only to those who win or excel in some field, not to everyone who attempts to succeed.