

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom.
Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Eighty-Two

Competition

LESSON IDEA

To show that competition is an essential ingredient in the free enterprise system. It works automatically to see that we get better goods at lower prices, and to reward those who have earned it.

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IN THE COUNTRY of Utopia, the leading university in the capital city of Daydream once had a very fine baseball team. At the start of the season, no one really thought the team would do very well. It did not have any outstanding players on it, the coach was new to the job, and last season the team had not even broken .500.

But this year was different. The team, which was called the Hopefuls, won its first game in the eleventh inning by a score of 3 to 2. The players won their second game by 5 to 1, leading all the way. During their next three games, their opponents never scored a run. The sixth game went into extra innings, but again the Hopefuls won it. With two out in the bottom of the thirteenth inning, the pitcher hit a bloop single into right field, scoring a man from third.

On and on the season went. When it was over, the Hopefuls had won the city championship with an undefeated record. Then, they took the regional championship. And finally, in a game that lasted twenty-three innings, they won the national championship by a score of 9 to 8.

The entire country exploded with excitement.

The underdog team from the nation's capital had had a perfect season! Thousands of excited fans lined the streets of Daydream to cheer the players. The mayor gave them the key to the city. Politicians stood in line, to have their photographs taken with the team.

One legislator, who represented the district where the team's best hitter lived, even proposed that the Congress of Utopia pass a bill, proclaiming the team the best that ever played baseball. In fact, he suggested the team was so good that it should never have to play another game. "After all," he said, "haven't these boys already proven they are the best? Why should they have to prove it again and again?"

To the surprise of everyone except those who know how politicians sometimes vote, the Congress did approve the bill. By law, it proclaimed that the Hopefuls would never have to play another game to prove they were the best; they were declared champions by an act of Congress.

THE TEAM WENT on a tour of the nation, meeting fans, speaking in schools, riding in parades, opening fairs, and visiting hospitals. Everywhere they went, the champions were welcomed and cheered and invited to huge banquets. In fact, for eighteen months they did almost everything but practice or play baseball.

Then one day, during a visit way out in the country, the Hopefuls were invited to play a

practice game with the local high school team. There were only fifteen children in the high school, and eight of them were girls. So the baseball team had a girl playing shortstop, and another playing left field. They were pretty good, too.

Naturally, no one thought the high school team would do very well. After all, they were playing the best team in the nation. But the Hopefuls had not practiced or played in eighteen months, and it quickly became obvious that something was wrong. First, they couldn't get a hit. Then, when they took the field, the centerfielder missed a pop fly, the pitcher walked five men in a row, the shortstop tripped and fell while chasing an easy ground ball, and the second baseman threw the ball over the first baseman's head by ten feet! To everyone's surprise, when the game was over the high school students – including the girl who played shortstop and the one who played left field – had beaten the famous champions by a score of 23 to 2.

Everyone was amazed at the results. They couldn't imagine what had happened to the champion team. But you know what happened, don't you? What was it? [*Encourage everyone to answer, until all agree that the lack of competition was what hurt the team.*] Can you imagine any team that could improve, or even remain the same, without playing other teams? Why is competition so essential to develop athletic ability? Would practice alone be enough?

FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

Elementary school students will recognize at once why competition is essential in sports contests. But it is doubtful if many of them have considered how the very same principles apply to our economic system. Draw further parallels from tonight's lesson, to make certain they understand this point.

For example, what would happen in a baseball game if every time a team scored a run, the umpire demanded they play with one less person? Or gave the other team extra outs until they caught up?

In sports, only the champion team receives the trophy. Is this fair? What if every team received one, whether it finished first or last? How do these same principles apply to what happens in business, when government interferes with the free enterprise system?

THE SAME THING is true in the free enterprise system. It depends on competition to improve production and distribution, and to lower prices. In business, the "prize" is increased sales, not a trophy. And competition works automatically to award this prize to the businessman or producer or manufacturer who earns it.

Let's take a look at one product and see what happens as a result of competition. For our discussion, let's use something with which we are all familiar, and which really hasn't changed much over the years. Let's see what competition has done for milk.

Many years ago, most families had a very simple way to get the milk they wanted. They did not depend on dairies or bottlers or milk stores. What do you think they did? [*They raised and milked their own cows.*] Before too long, someone decided to go into the business of raising cows, and selling milk to his neighbors. He became a specialist. What do you think would determine whether people bought milk from him, or continued to raise their own cows? [*The answer, of course, is price.*]

Yes, if our entrepreneur (which means someone who starts a business) could sell milk at such a low price that his neighbors would rather pay him for it than raise their own cows, he would be in the dairy business. And as he got more and more customers for his milk, he would need to buy more cows, and hire more workers. He would probably need to get a wagon, or several wagons, for the deliveries. Which means he would need drivers, and horses, and more milk jugs.

Now, if this business began to make a profit for its owner, something else would soon happen. What do you think it would be? Yes, someone else would decide to go into the dairy business. In larger communities, there might be four or five different dairies selling milk. With this many different dairies, what would happen to milk prices? Would they get very high, or stay as low as possible? How would this competition keep prices down? Competition would also encourage each dairyman to search for even better ways to produce milk less expensively. Why would a dairy farmer want to lower his costs?

Without trying to list all of the advances that have been made in the dairy industry to reduce

