



# The Strange Mysteries of Competition

Competition is a complex activity that leads to some mysterious behaviors. These strange behaviors arise from the fact that in every sport we are playing two types of games simultaneously:

- **The outer game.** The one measured by the scoreboards and timers, in which we worry about winning and earning others' respect
- **The inner game.** The one measured by joy and concentration, in which we lose ourselves in the intensity and mastery of the sport

Let's look at some of the mysteries of competition to see how the inner and outer games function. Please indicate whether you think the following mystery statements are generally true or false and be prepared to discuss the reasons for your responses.

- **Mystery 1.** We can usually win at any sport by playing someone less skilled at the game than we are. Yet when given a choice, we prefer to play an opponent who plays better than we do.  
*Circle one: True or False*
- **Mystery 2.** We choose an opponent who will help us learn the game. But once the game begins, our expectations usually shift: winning becomes the primary goal.  
*Circle one: True or False*
- **Mystery 3.** We like an opponent who will most challenge us—in other words, help us grow as players and as persons. By playing the part of an enemy, he or she becomes a real friend.  
*Circle one: True or False*
- **Mystery 4.** We play our best against a player who is at her or his best. Yet we often allow ourselves or fans to intimidate an opponent to force her or him to quit playing at top form.  
*Circle one: True or False*
- **Mystery 5.** The winner in any game is the person who gets more out of it. The better player gets some satisfaction, but the lesser player learns more. So the loser is usually the winner.  
*Circle one: True or False*
- **Mystery 6.** Most coaches are genuinely concerned about players' well-being. But coaches are often judged by their win-loss record, not by what players learn.  
*Circle one: True or False*