



Episode: #84

Disappointment in Dog Sports: Mindset with Olympian Greg Louganis

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

GL Greg Louganis (Guest)

Transcript

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SG One of the toughest things that any of us have to do is recover from disappointment. And a lot of times that disappointment, is a ratio on what our expectations are of a situation, and the outcomes that we get. So, if our expectations are low and the outcomes are amazing, we're happy, but if our expectations are high and the outcomes are not as good, then disappointment can lead to depression and it actually can affect our enjoyment of what we're doing.

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A lot of people quit activities because of their disappointment in themselves or that they're disappointing others. That is the focus of today's podcast. And I'm super excited because, who would be better to talk about disappointment than somebody who's won seven Olympic gold medals?

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And you're going to say, "Well, it sounds like this person's won a lot." But he's also had to overcome a lot of disappointment. So, I'm so thrilled to introduce you all to my very good friend, the one and only Greg Louganis. So welcome, Greg.

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GL Thank you. And you gave me a few more Olympic gold medals?

SG Oh, I always give you two extra! I don't know where, but you know what, those were the boycotted ones. I know you're going to get double gold there. So, whenever I'm talking about you, I always say seven, and people look you up on Wikipedia, "I think this dude's only got five." No, there was the boycotted Russian ones, and I know that he was in his prime he would've had those as well.

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So, I want to share how we came about. I got to bring Greg in on this conversation. So, we got an email into our customer happiness. It was a private email sent by one of the members of our [Agility Nation](#). So, it's for dog agility. Greg, I'm sure that you have your, "these were the most disappointing or devastating moments" for you.

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But I want to share two that I can think of that may have been, and maybe you don't want to talk about them and I might be putting you on the spot, but the most obvious was when you were at the Olympics, I think it was 88, and you were supposed to be a shoe-in, but you had, was it the Chinese diver? That was neck and neck with you? And then you hit your head.

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GL Okay. Yeah. Susan, those were two separate events.

SG Okay, so go ahead, fill me in.



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GL Okay so, in the men's springboard preliminaries, I did my reverse two and a half and hit my head on the board. And you know, when you do something like that, I'm supposed to be a pretty good diver. And pretty good divers don't do stuff like that.

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So, my first sense was, I came off the board; I knew I was going to be close. So, I was afraid of hitting my head, and then I thought I was past the board and I heard this big hollow thud. And I go crashing in the water and I'm going, "What was that?" And then I realized, "Oh my God, that was my head".

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And I go crashing into the water. And the first feeling I felt was embarrassment, because I was supposed to be a pretty good diver. And pretty good divers don't do that kind of thing. And then I got angry with myself. And I think that it was the anger that really pushed me through.

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So, I had my head sewn up, and then my coach came to me, Ron O'Brien. He said, "You know, look, you can walk away. You don't have to get back up on the board. I'll support you a hundred percent." And I turned to him and I said, "we've worked too long and hard to get here and I don't want to give up without a fight." So, then he said, "Okay".

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SG And where did that put you? Zeros? Now that you're trying to get a spot to get into the next round, correct?

GL Yeah, so, I thought because I did get some zeros, but I got some halves and ones I did complete the dive. So, I thought I was totally out of the running. And I had stacked up a big enough lead that I, you know, just dropped. I still had two more dives. So, I had to complete those dives to stay in the top, to make the finals.

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SG So, what are you feeling? You know you have to do the dives, you're angry at yourself and so how do you recover from that Greg, and get back up for your next dive?

GL Well, that's the thing you know, because you know I've been doing all this work. Right brain, left brain and performance lives in the right brain. It's very creative. Color, music, all of that lives in the right brain. You know that your physical ability, your performance, is right there. And so, my coach started joking with me and saying, "Oh, hockey players get 30 stitches and get back on the ice, you know. You've got five stitches in your head; that's nothing."

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And we were just laughing. Because when you do something like that, it just totally destroys your confidence. I mean, I had absolutely no confidence and that was one of the things that my coach, Ron O'Brien told me. He said, "Look, I know you don't have any confidence in yourself, but believe in me because I believe in you."



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And so, I had that love, trust and faith in that. And so, I got up on the board and they announced my dive. I hit on a reverse two and a half pike; I was doing a reverse one and a half with three and a half twists, is my next dive, going in the same direction. So, they announced the dive, I set the board.

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SG And you can't change that and say, "I don't want to do a reverse right now"?

GL No, I can't. "Yeah, I don't want to go in that direction," no. And so, I set the board and when they announced the dive, I could hear from the audience an audible gasp, like, "Oh my God!". Cause, I was scared too. And I felt like my heart was beating outside my chest, so I took a deep breath and then I patted my chest.

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So, the two things I did, and fear is excitement minus breath. So, then I added the breath, and I patted my chest, and the people who are around me saw that and they giggled, they're like, "Oh my God, he's scared too. He's afraid".

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And it made me laugh because I was like, "Oh my God, these people are on my side. They want to see me succeed". And I'm scared too. And I had no idea what was going to happen because a dive takes less than three seconds, and you have to be on. And so, I had no idea. And this is the Olympics; you can't hold back at the Olympics.

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SG Had you ever hit your head before in any dive in practice?

GL Yeah, in a competition in Tbilisi in Georgia, there was the Soviet Union at that time. I hit my head on the platform and I was out for 20 minutes. I had a pretty bad concussion. And the thing about that one is I don't remember it.

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SG Wow.

GL I remember jumping up, touching my feet. I was doing a reverse dive and I saw the sun and my legs, and I thought what a beautiful day and nothing. Nothing after that. So, I don't remember hitting; I don't remember landing in the water. And that was easy to get over because I don't remember it. The reverse two and a half in 88, in Seoul, I was totally conscious.

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SG But Greg, what do you do with the humiliation and the embarrassment, that you're the best diver in the world and you just pooped the bed.

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GL Yeah, and it was not pretty. You know, the thing is, it was an isolated incident. And what a lot of people said was, "How did you get over that?". I didn't have time to get over that. In order to get over something, you have to process it and processing takes time. I had to do that dive in that competition. I didn't have time to get over it. So, it's like I put that incident in a box and put it on the shelf. "I'll deal with it later", it's like it didn't happen.



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SG And did you go back to that during those same Olympics? Or did you go back to that at a later point? Or did you ever go back to that?

GL At a later point. When it was far after the Olympic games. I just set that aside, and the other thing too, I mean, I was favored to win at that Olympics. There was a lot going on. I was diagnosed HIV positive six months before, I was on AZT, so there were those stressors. And my coach, Ron O'Brien, his mother went into a coma.

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She died while we were at the Olympics. And so, he wasn't sure if he was going to be staying with us or not. And I couldn't have gotten through that Olympics without him. And so, his mindset was that his mother would have wanted him to stay. There was nothing for him to do at home. And so, there was so much going on and both Ron and I, before the Olympics, were quite distracted with a lot of things.

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And so, in that incident, the second that I hit my head, it shifted everything. Nothing's guaranteed, nothing's for sure; anything can happen. And it forced us to focus on each moment. It was one dive at a time, moment by moment, getting through. And so, I think that's what helped us because we've been through this. And Susan, it's like what you say, "we get good at what we practice", right?

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And so, these are things that I practiced through my entire career. So, when you see an Olympic performance, what people are seeing is a finished product of years and hours, hundreds of thousands of hours of training.

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SG And obviously, it's just an unconscious routine. You can't be in that three-second period and go, "Okay. Remember to point your toes".

GL Right. And because if you start thinking that way, if you start thinking left brain analytical, it's done, because if it's too late, you can't make synapses that quickly, from your left brain to your right brain.

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SG I just want to recap the things that we talked about. So, I wrote some things down, and one is, at that moment when you're disappointed, whatever happens, acknowledging what you feel. And where are you feeling it in your body?

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And then giving it permission to be there, because we're humans and we feel anger or disappointment and a big one is disappointing the others, our coaches and our family. Like my spouse at home, who we've invested some of our money in me going to this event and now look, I've not done so well. So, there's all that disappointment. So, acknowledging that.

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And then looking at the things that are outside of your control that you've attached, and allowed to come into effect, and what meaning that we're giving that. That really putting things in a lotus, and sending them off.



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And then looking for “what was the lesson in there?”. And it might not be obvious right away. I mean, by her writing that letter, we’ve had this conversation and it’s just opened up possibilities to so many more people. And is there anything you wanted to add there, Greg?

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GL Yeah, Susan. The one thing that I wanted to add is that, oftentimes because this has been something that I’ve struggled with too. I’m fearful of certain emotions—anger, hate, rage. I’m fearful. So, I’ll squelch them down. It’s okay to feel those. And also, don’t be afraid to cry.

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Don’t be afraid to cry. Don’t be afraid to laugh. You know, that’s okay, to acknowledge those feelings, those sensations, those emotions. They are what they are, and you have to feel them to get beyond them.

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SG And have you visualized somebody saying, “You can quit.”

GL Yeah.

SG “You can quit.”

GL Yeah.

SG But then, where does that leave you? You have that power. So, I think a lot of times, like you talked about social media and people growing up in this world today, that they’re afraid to put themselves out there because of the implications of them not being successful. We’re not all successful a lot of the times, and be okay with that. Because otherwise, you’re going to walk away from so many things that could be amazing parts of your life.

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GL Yeah and the thing is, I didn’t read my press. Had I read my press in my first Olympics, which it was a silver medal not gold, in Montreal. Had I read the press and I’ve been obsessed with that, I never would have stepped foot on that platform. Because it was the two young guys, going after the Klaus Dibiasi of Italy. The old man, and so I didn’t read that.

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My filter at that time, through my diving career, was my mom. I wouldn’t read my press, but if my mom read an article and they had nice things to say to me, she’, “Okay, read this article so the next time you see this reporter, you can go to them and thank them for their kind words”, because I was going to see those sports reporters again.

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SG Oh that’s beautiful. There’s a couple of things I remember you used to say all the time, that learning from your mom was your way of grounding yourself. No matter what the outcome, my mother is still gonna love me.

GL Yep. No matter what happens, my mother’s still gonna love me.



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SG And that was a way that you put yourself into your right brain so that you could perform at your best. And another thing that's completely unrelated, but I say this over and over, and I've told so many people this one that came from your mom is, "try to leave a place better than when you arrived".

GL Yeah.

SG That was so beautiful.

GL Make everywhere you go better because you were there.

SG Yeah.

GL Whether it's picking up a piece of trash or anything.

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SG Saying a kind word.

GL Yeah, say kind words and smile. I can attest to that one. I was going to a really bad mindset, and I was at the market, and somebody smiled and it's like, "Oh my God", no words were exchanged. He just smiled at me and I was like, "Aww." And so, you don't know how that just opens up somebody else's heart when they needed that kind of virtual embrace.

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SG Absolutely. You're always smiling with your eyes though! Is there anything else that we're going to include here? I mean, we've covered so many things. I probably am not going to do them justice in the summary of "how we can overcome and how important it is to overcome". Because life has a way of bringing lessons back to you if you ignore them the first time.

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And what a beautiful way to learn them other than doing a sport that you love. And just embrace that as "this is meant for me and it's amazing", even though you might be falling on your face or hitting your head on a diving board. It's meant for you, right?

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GL Yeah. I think the important thing too Susan, is we have to practice courage all the time. But we also have to acknowledge those courageous acts that we do every day.

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SG That's so good.

GL Because we're stepping through things that are uncomfortable all the time. That's part of life. And by acknowledging it and giving ourselves that little pat on the back like, "Yeah, I was really brave today."

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SG And that's so important regardless if you are competing in a sport, you're running a business, and you something disastrous happens, then you're near financial ruin. Acknowledge that you were courageous, and move on. And so important if you're a parent and you have a child who's completely devastated because of an outcome in sport or at school.



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And to not discount their feelings and say, "Let's go get an ice cream". To do what your mom did and say, "You know, let's acknowledge it." And then when there are great things that they do well, I think acknowledging effort is far more important than acknowledging talent or success.

GL Right.

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SG Acknowledging effort because continuous effort will bring success. But if you're proud, if you say I'm so proud of you because you got this metal or you achieved this status, you need to be proud because of the effort. Because when they don't achieve that status, "did I lose the pride that you have in me?"

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GL Right. Yeah. And [Carol Dweck](#) does a wonderful job in explaining that as you know, "Oh, you're brilliant. You're awesome.", but to acknowledge exactly what you're saying, acknowledging the effort that it took to get there because otherwise, that's where we're building pressure.

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"Oh, you're a genius. You're a genius; you're all of these things." Then what we're doing is we're putting a limitation on a potential successor. But if you're validating the effort and the courage, you're acknowledging that that's just a place of trajectory that you can continue on and that your limitations are limitless.

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SG Absolutely. That's just so perfect. And it just goes back to the man in the arena, that beautiful poem that is acknowledging that you're the one who had the courage to say, "I think I'm ready". And regardless of the outcome, you have the courage to say, "I think I'm ready. I'm going to put myself in this situation." And there is no failure after that.

GL Right.

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SG There's, you're winning a lesson or you're winning a class and hopefully you're still finding lessons in that win.

GL Yeah.

SG Greg, this has been so awesome. Thank you! Thank you for doing this so early in the morning for you out there in California. And I miss you!

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GL I miss you too! Oh my God.

SG I know. I can't wait for this pandemic to end, then we can be in person having chats.

GL Yeah. Me too.



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SG So thank you for doing it. And anybody who's watching this, please leave us a comment. Let me know what gold you were able to glean from this conversation between one of the greatest athletes of all times and one of the greatest people, more importantly. And such an awesome person. Leave us a comment and let us know.

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And then check out [Greg's Meditation In Motion](#) program. Because anytime you get to spend with this man is time well spent.

GL Thank you, Susan. I miss you so much.

SG I miss you too, buddy.

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How special was that? Greg Louganis. One of the most amazing humans on the planet right here on the podcast. You don't have to be training for some elite outcome with your dog. You could be training your dog just to be an amazing member of your family. But sometimes, things don't happen the way they should, and disappointment is going to happen. And that's why I felt this interview would be of great value for everybody to listen to at least in part.

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Remember, celebrate courage, look at where you stepped up today, just by attempting to train your puppy or your dog. Celebrate your dog's courage today. Look for what's good. Allow yourself to feel emotions of anger or frustration, or disappointment. That's the only way you're going to move on from them.

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For those of you watching this video, who are members of Agility Nation, jump on over to Agility Nation now because the full interview, which is well over an hour long, is there waiting for you. And there is a lot of gems to be gleaned. For those of you who are watching this, and you aren't on Agility Nation and you would love to hear more about Greg had to say, I'm going to make it very accessible to everybody.

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Agility Nation is a membership that has obviously a lot of information about how to train your dog in agility. But there's a lot more in that membership as well, because it's been around for five years. So, when you join, you don't just get access to this month's information. You get access to all 415 videos that are there.

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So, things like puppy training or fitness both for dogs and for humans. I'll share some of my own coaches, like Courtney Stephen, a professional football player who shares some amazing way to improve your footwork for running. Or my fitness trainer, who shares some exercises on mobility or strength training.





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There's a lot of dog training, and yes, there's a lot of agility. You can join for a month or you could stay on for as long as you like. Agility Nation is \$79 a month. But when you [go to register](#), put in the discount code of GREG20. Yeah, he should have won 20 Olympic medals, right? I'm giving him a couple extra now.

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Use code GREG20 to receive a discount so that you can watch this video in its entirety. As I mentioned before, please leave me a comment. Let me know if this was of value and if you would like me to interview somebody in the future. See you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Agility Nation](#)

[Mindset: The New Psychology of Success - By: Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D](#)

Use promocode GREG20 to [join Agility Nation](#) at a Discount!

[Meditation in Motion with Greg Louganis](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her “Clicker Dogs” website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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