



Olympics 2024 – D15 – Poker Face & Cliffhanger- emotional intelligence

The advertising of a razor brand touting boldly «perfection in male» had chosen for its summer campaign the French world record man of decathlon, Kevin Mayer whose goal was the gold medal at Paris 2024. The slogan is sadly ironic. The champion had to forfeit on Thursday, August 1. His body, hard tried by years of training and efforts, has let go. The mind is not enough; the greatest tenors and famous divas have all known this «couac» where the voice, a fragile muscle, has been missing. A documentary was dedicated to the French champion, “Kevin Mayer: under high tension”, eloquent and prescient.

For the flag-bearer of the French delegation, Mélina Robert-Michon, a multi-medallist in disc throwing who participated in her seventh Olympic Games, the result is bitter. She finished 12th, a failure that she explains by too much pressure, «playing at home» with a very enthusiastic audience, too much for some athletes who need to concentrate. She analyses her performance by mismanaging this determining factor – she was too isolated from the atmosphere, the noise, she did not let herself be carried away and supported by the audience.

The selection of the French basketball team in the quarter-finals against a German world champion team gave a vivid illustration of the self-control that athletes must have - «poker face» to not be distracted by their opponents (impressed by so much calm) nor by their audience (both an asset and a threat, the fear of disappointing them). The “cliffhanger” was total on Thursday, August 8 and immense relief in the French team – the winners let their joy explode, their opponents showed their sadness but with elegance, and the conquered audience pushed a huge “Wow” of relief.

The management of one’s emotions, which was once called “self control” or British phlegm in a more literary (and highly romanticized) version, is probably the most demanded quality for managers or executives who are under formidable pressure from their professional partners (whom they must convince of their skills and mastery of their files), but also and especially of their troops (which they must constantly reassure), and of their surroundings (sometimes very relative supports when they are overtaken by events).

One is not born with a "poker face", but very early on is subjected to very disruptive stimuli (cliffhanger)- the anxiety of the first times, when you must understand everything while discovering everything, things, people or situations totally unknown. Being confronted very early with anxiety-generating situations can be a two-way thing. We have the experience of obstacle courses that we sometimes pulled off with honors, other times without glory with the burning memory of not being up to par. Emotions stimulate memory, memories can help. But they are useful and effective only if we know how to analyse them with detachment, or at least with a critical mind.

Physical exercise is useful to control one’s body, the first messenger of one’s emotions (body language). The brain remains the first ally of champions and other human beings – knowing how to identify stimuli, analyse them with cold blood without excessive joy or anger, and above all turn them into concrete and useful action in one’s life. This is the task we all face – “a little softness in a world of bullies” was the slogan.

- (1) Anaïs Brosseau « JO de Paris 2024- comment le public du Stade de France fait réveiller certains athlètes », France Télévisions - Rédaction Sport- Publié le 09/08/2024 06:30
- (2) Commission européenne (2007) « Livre Blanc sur le sport » - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0391&from=DA>
- (3) COJO- <https://olympics.com/fr/paris-2024/comite/nos-responsabilites/financement-des-jeux>
- (4) France télévision- retransmission du match de basket France/Allemagne – quart de finale- jeudi 8 août 2024
- (5) Bénédicte Halba (1997) « Economie du sport », Paris : Economica
- (6) Bénédicte Halba (1999) « Dopage et sport », Toulouse : Milan
- (7) Benjamin Montel (2024) « Kevin Mayer : sous haute tension, France, documentaire diffusé sur France 2 le mardi 16 juillet 2024

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