No trophy case? More room for the wine rack Col. #30

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For the 99.9% of the people on the planet who are not particularly great at anything, the payoff is that you don't have to purchase a trophy case. Also, those big honkin' championship rings can really get in the way when you're on the road and trying to communicate with a bad driver.

With awards being the currency of today's all-consuming fame game, the people who manufacture trophies can barely keep up to the number of new award shows popping up each year.

Last year Fox's *Teen Choice Awards* featured Britney Spears and Adam Sandler which shows there are so many awards being presented they're running out of talented people to give them to.

Last year the cable TV network Nickelodeon created the *Kid's Choice Awards* - "and the winner of the Best Highchair Food Fight is ..." Not to be outdone the History Channel invented a prize for the best historical movies called the *Harrys* after Herodotus, the father of history. Boring? Anybody who has watched this TV award show and was still awake at the end of it wished they had called it "The Harry Houdinis" and made the whole damn thing disappear.

Today sales of and plaques and trophies in Canada and the United States top $3 billion dollars. In the beginning, trophies were rare, special and quite dramatic. Devised during the dawn of warfare the very first trophy consisted of the severed head of the enemy impaled on a stick. I'm not suggesting we return to this practise but it would sure boost the Nielsen ratings for the Super Bowl's postgame show. "You know Phil, Peyton Manning doesn't look all that intimidating without his body but he's still got that competitive fire in his eyes."

In Southern California, there's a youth soccer organization that hands out 3,500 trophies every season. Each player in the league gets one, while about a third of the kids wind up with two. Can you imagine if each and every one of them made an acceptance speech? The banquet would be longer than the soccer season! They'll have to chase the little tykes off the stage with cattle prods when they begin thanking grandma and grandpa and first cousins.

Trophies used to be coveted plaques carved from wood and plated with gold or silver and you had to do something extraordinary to win one. Today they're made of tin and plastic and everybody gets one for showing up.

Giving away hundreds of thousands of trophies in kids' sports leagues every season only serves to ensure great attendance at the year-end banquets. In North America, 'participation trophies' do little more than reward children for underachieving and in doing so, kills their incentive to win something meaningful. Life is not a group hug or a sports league where everyone who signs on is an automatic winner.

Sorry but life is hard and frequently unfair so losing and overcoming the losses is how we get better at playing the game. Kids that are constantly being congratulated for lame accomplishments are in for an earthquake of disappointment when they do have to face failure. And they will. Small failures along the way help kids handle the big ones down the line and make a real win, all that much sweeter. A word of praise, a pat on the back, a hearty thumbs up, a slap on the bum - these are much more powerful motivators than a truckload of shiny trinkets made worthless by their ubiquity. I'd like to know how many of those 3,500 soccer trophies hit the bottom of the garbage bins as the kids exit the hall.

If all the horses in a race are allowed to celebrate in the winner's circle, we're going to need bigger winner's circles. And next time out, why would any horse try to beat the competition since they all get to smell the roses and have their pictures taken anyway? California Chrome lost four of his first six races before he decided winning was a lot more fun and went on to win the Kentucky Derby.

In the end the goal of all people should be a full and productive life. You learn how to achieve that by being tripped up a whole bunch of times from behind but still battling forward to achieve that goal. Losing is how we learn, stumbling but still striving is how we earn special compensation for the effort. You don't learn a helluva lot by standing on a podium with 2,000 fellow competitors, all congratulating each other on excellent attendance.

Sorry to get preachy on you but I've thought a lot about this while I was preparing my acceptance speech for the International Curmudgeon Society's Sourpuss Of The Year. What the hell, it's better than a poke in the eye, plus there's a meal and some sort of plaque involved.

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