



## Needing a Win

By Blake Hurst

SYRACUSE, NEBRASKA—We drove the 60 miles home with tears of frustration running down Ben's face. He'd just lost two wrestling matches, and he was mad, and disappointed, and embarrassed. Ben is 15, a high school freshman, and a delightful kid, but his freshman season of wrestling has been difficult. No, it's been awful.

There are only four kids on his team, all underclassmen, so Julie and I, along with a contingent of about four other parents, one coach, and one cheerleader (the others quit) have been traveling around Iowa and Missouri and Nebraska this winter, watching our sons spend most of the season on their backs. I think it was Grantland Rice who said, and I'm paraphrasing here, that "the race doesn't always go to the swift, or the battle to the strong, but that's the way to bet." In adolescent wrestling, bet on the kid with hair on his legs.

While the cool kids all play basketball, Ben decided his future lay in wrestling. So he'll never know the excitement that surrounds high school hoops: No packed gyms with a full coterie of cheerleaders and pep band. No high school chorus starting contests with the national anthem. No big spread in the local paper (especially since the son of the guy who owns our newspaper shows every sign of being an outstanding shooting guard). For local wrestlers it's just sweat and empty gyms on Saturday afternoons, and trips home bearing the sting of another defeat at the hands of someone older,

more experienced, and more athletic.

We suffer through four-hour tournaments, hoping the halt and lame of Rock Port, Stanberry, and Hopkins will be wrestling in the 152-pound class. Instead, every kid who shakes hands with Ben at the start of each match looks like he just stepped out of a commercial for home exercise equipment. Sometimes they pin Ben in seconds, sometimes he lasts the whole six minutes, and a few times he's won, but every match is exhausting.

Nobody ever told me that being a parent was so much work, and so confusing. How do you deal with the disappointment of your only son, who lifts weights three times a week, who practices for two hours every night, who studies the tapes of each match, who hasn't eaten a full meal in over two months in order to make his weight class? The truth is, we would really like him to pin some sucker from a neighboring town and spend a drive home with a happy kid.

Say what you will about the benefits of competition, the preparation for life that comes with difficulties, the satisfaction that comes from working hard toward a goal, the honor that comes from playing by the rules. When you're 15 none of these things can substitute for winning.

Parents of young athletes have been much in the news lately, and the stories always paint us in a bad light. It's said we're too wrapped up in our kids, too focused on winning, all suburban Mike Tysons ready to explode at any affront from opposing players, parents, coaches, or referees. I don't see that at all. What I see is parents so nervous they can hardly

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sit, so dedicated they drive hundreds of miles a week to practices and games, and concerned about winning only because they want what their kids want.

I myself don't particularly care about my son's won-lost record, or his wrestling future, or whether his team ever wins a meet. But he is working so hard, and wants to win so much, that I'd trade about anything to get him just a few successful outings.

I'll never confront a referee, although I've yelled at a few. And I'm sure Ben will always conduct himself honorably, because we demand it.

Having said all that, please forgive me for hoping that one of his future opponents sprains his ankle, or breaks up with his girlfriend the night before, or just has a bad day. Because Ben really, really, needs a win.

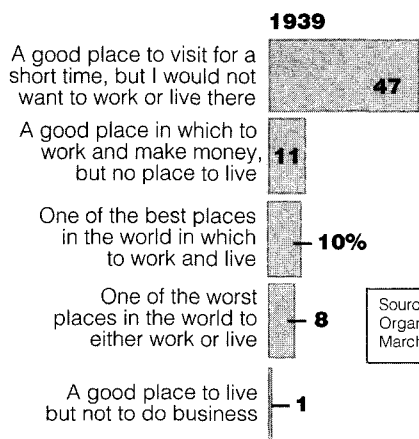


## New York City: A Nice Place to Visit, But...

In 1939, a near majority of Americans told pollsters that New York City was a good place to visit, but they wouldn't want to live or work there. Interest in visiting dipped to 34 percent in the crime-ridden late 1970s. More recently, the portion that says New York City is a good place to visit is up sharply, but interest in living there still lags far behind. The way questions are worded affects responses about whether and how the World Trade Center complex should be rebuilt.

**Question:** With which of these statements do you come closest to agreeing...?

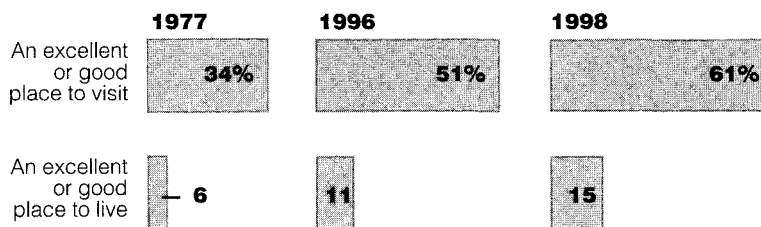
### New York City is...



Source: The Roper Organization, March 1939.

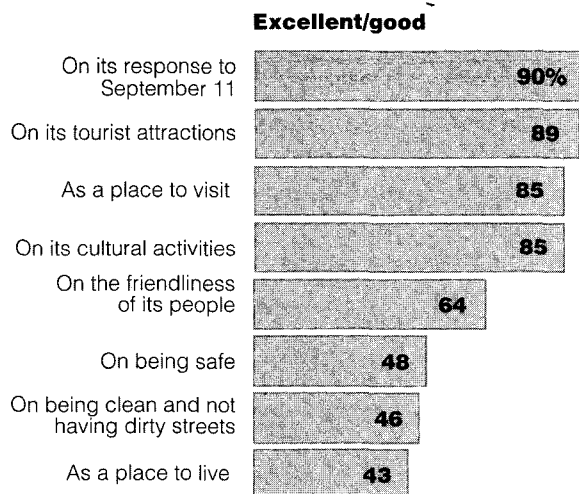
**Question:** How would you rate New York City?

### New York City is...



Source: CBS News/New York Times, July 1977; CBS News, July 1996 and March 1998.

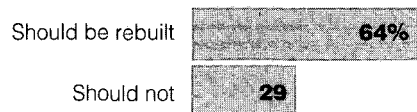
**Question:** How would you rate New York City ...?



Source: Quinnipiac University, November-December 2001.

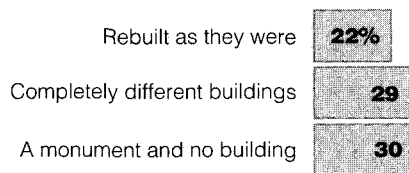
**Question:** Do you think ...?

### The twin towers of the World Trade Center



Source: The Gallup Organization for CNN and USA Today, September 2001.

**Question:** Would you like to see the twin towers of the World Trade Center...?



Source: Opinion Dynamics/Fox News, November 2001.