

ON THE MONEY

Winning

at all costs

Kathleen Morrell's competitive traits have served her well.

Because of her drive — and hard work — she has earned the No. 2 class ranking at Elmira Notre Dame High School.

"It's very rewarding. The competition has paid off," said Kathleen, a senior. She explained that she motivated herself by pitting her academic achievements against other students'.

But there have been times, Kathleen admitted, when her competitive juices have flowed a bit too freely.

"Sometimes, if I realized somebody might be doing better than me (in the class rankings) and they asked me if they could borrow my homework, I wouldn't give it to them, even if they'd helped me in the past," said Kathleen, 17, a parishioner at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Elmira.

Teens interviewed for this story agreed that competitiveness is a good, and even necessary, quality — but only to a point.

On the one hand, Kathleen said, "Everybody, to get somewhere in life, has to have some little bit of competitive drive."

Then again, Katie Juba observed, "Sometimes it brings out the worst in people."

"I am an extremely competitive person. Sometimes that's a good thing, but it's not always a good thing," said Katie, 16, from St. Lawrence Church in Greece.

Katie, a junior at Greece Athena High School, is ranked No. 6 in her junior class. She said that she, along with other



Story by Mike Litona
Photo Illustration by Greg Francis

kind of stuff," said Jerry, 16, from St. Louis Church in Pittsford. "To me it's like, who cares, it's only a game. It's not like, (a) you're making a lot of money or, (b) it's going to affect you for the rest of your life."

For those who *do* make a lot of money, Karen observed a troubling trend among today's professional athletes: They not only compete for titles, but also for the highest paychecks.

"They want to beat each other on the pricing list *besides* on the field. They should just be happy being millionaires," Karen stated.

However, Kathleen pointed out, it's not easy for highly competitive people to change their tendencies. The youngest of four children, she said she became determined at an early age to equal the athletic, academic and fine-arts accomplishments of her older siblings who graduated from Elmira Notre Dame. She added that she was especially driven by a brother who told her that once she reached high school, she would struggle to get A's.

"I said, 'Well, if they can do those things, then I can do them,'" Kathleen recalled.

Kathleen said her views about competitiveness did begin to change this year when her Christian lifestyle class at Notre Dame explored the hazards of being overcompetitive.

"You can narrow your view to just winning, and recognition from winning. (The class) makes you pull back and wonder why you were competing in the first place," Kathleen said.

"Sometimes, in the competitiveness of striving for a goal, you forget why you were getting there," she added.

Some examples of being overcompetitive, Kathleen said, include stealing money from your parents to win an award for being a top fundraiser; cheating to get an A on a test; or using steroids to enhance an athletic performance.

When this occurs, Kathleen remarked, "You lose self-respect; people lose respect for you; and you lose respect for other people because you perceive them as the enemy."

Mike stated that you don't necessarily have to overexert yourself in order to get the edge on your rival. For instance, he said he was elected Student Council president last spring after running a low-key campaign. He preferred to let his personality and accomplishments speak for themselves, he said, whereas he felt his opponent ran a more aggressive campaign by hanging banners and posters, and distributing flyers.

And Jerry said that he practices restraint, rather than aggressiveness, when competing with another guy for a girl's affections.

"I'm going to try to outclass him by being a nice guy — not necessarily to just that girl, but to other girls, too," he said.

**Coming next week:
Debating**

high-achieving students, worry more often than necessary about who will be No. 1. For instance, she said that some of these students complain if their competitors sign up for courses that might lead to an easy A.

"There's about 10 people who want to bump each other off to be valedictorian," she said.

Katie said that she has mixed feelings about her competitive concern with class rankings. Whereas she wants badly to reach the No. 1 spot, she also remarked, "I don't want to step on my friends."

Athletes said that limits are also hard to observe in the competitive world of sports. Mike Tranter, a football and basketball player at Notre Dame, said that during his athletic career, he has seen friendships and team spirit threatened when teammates contend for starting positions.

"If somebody gets ahead of someone else, a kid will show it and get bitter toward that person," said Mike, 18, a senior who attends the St. Anthony/St. Patrick parish cluster in Elmira. He declined to elaborate on specific incidents, saying that he does not want to cause friction among his teammates.

And Karen Readell has run across over-competitive athletes when she has taken part in the Games for the Physically Challenged.

"They're all grumpy. They kind of throw things around and start cussing," said Karen, 18, from Church of the Good Shepherd in Henrietta.

Karen, who has cerebral palsy, said her attitude is simply to "try to do my best. And if that involves beating other people, then that's even better."

Jerry Votava agreed that winning is important but not essential. He remarked that when he played CYO basketball, he became annoyed by opponents who made a big deal out of winning.

"I really don't like that winner-take-all

Upcoming Milestones

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