

Would You Rather Win Silver Or Bronze? (Be Careful What You Wish For)

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NPR:

Both athletes were U.S. swimmers, both were dripping wet after finishing an Olympics final, and both had just won medals.

The first said, “It’s not my normal specialty. ... We went out there and raced tough – and just came up a little short.”

The second had a beaming face. He said, “[I] swam my own race. And knew I had a lane, and had an opportunity, and I went for it. It worked out, you know, it’s just awesome that I get to go on the podium tonight. Honestly, I’m really proud of myself!”

The disappointed athlete was Ryan Lochte, seconds after the 4x100m freestyle relay at the London 2012 Olympics. The guy who was thrilled? Brendan Hansen, just seconds after the 100-meter men’s breaststroke finals.

Here’s the funny part: The medal Lochte was disappointed to have won: silver. The medal Hansen was thrilled to have won: bronze.

Hansen put an exclamation mark on his delight when he exclaimed, “This is the shiniest bronze medal you will ever see. Ever.”

For decades, psychologists have noted an irony in elite athletic competition: If you set aside the happy people who win gold and look only at the people who come in second and third, it’s the men and women with bronze medals who invariably look happier than the athletes who won silver.

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In a paper they published after the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, researchers Victoria Medvec, Scott Madey and Thomas Gilovich evaluated photographs of athletes on the victory podium and also studied post-competition audio interviews. They found bronze medal-winners tended to be happier than silver medalists.

The psychologists guessed it was because silver medal-winners compare themselves to the athletes who won gold and feel they came up short. By contrast, bronze medal-winners seem to unconsciously compare themselves to people who didn’t win a medal at all.

Read the whole story: [NPR](#)