

FOOTBALL



HELP DESK

'Helping Coaches Helping Kids'

## THICK FACE – BLACK HEART

*Note: Originally, this article was published in 1996 for W.I.N. magazine. A revision was featured in GRAPPLING magazine in 2001. Following is another revision I found at [www.mattfurey.com](http://www.mattfurey.com) as well as my own thoughts on the subject. This line of thinking may not be for everyone. You may agree and you may not. If you do not agree that is ok, but please do not judge those who believe in it; instead accept that there is more than one way to accomplish your goals.*

Thick face - black heart is a term coined in the 1911 book, Thick Black Theory. Written in China, Thick Black Theory was banned the day it was published - and still is. What does this mean? It means that there must be a message inside the book that gives POWER to people - and those in power don't want them to have it. In a nutshell, it must be one amazing book.

Thick Black Theory has never been translated into English, but the essence of it was summarized in Chin-Ning Chu's book, Thick Face, Black Heart. Let me paraphrase some of the particulars:

**Thick Face:** The quality of being immune to the criticisms or negative opinions of others. It is also the ability to set aside your own doubts and fears, and proceed as if victory is inevitable. Early on in any highly successful person's career, whether the person is a combat athlete, a business exec or a politician, he will endure criticism from others. Some people will criticize the art he competes in; others his dedication; others the choice of career or his ideas, whether they are radical or mainstream. Of course, some will even question the successful person's abilities, skills and intellect.

I don't know of a single "success" that never had a moment of self-doubt or fear. Moreover, I don't know of any who did not have detractors. It's the nature of the game. In fact, the more successful a person becomes, the more detractors he will have. Truth is, many of the greatest champion athletes have become great because they feared losing. This fear drove them to train harder than anyone else - so when it was time to take center stage - they were ready. In business, many great decisions are made only when you mix a "burning desire to succeed" with a heavy dose of caution.

A thick-faced person isn't crushed by others' criticism. Although, like anyone else, a successful person likes approval ... he doesn't need it to survive. I am fond of saying, "Eagles don't fly in flocks; they fly alone." You cannot rise high in life if you depend upon the approval of everyone. You CAN however rise as high as you want or need with the approval of the right people.

What separates the champion or the "success" from the pack is the willingness to run on his own gas. If you believe in him and his dreams, fine. If not - his dream is more important than your opinion. A thick-faced person does not lose sleep over another person's negative comments. Criticism bounces off his face and goes elsewhere, looking for a thin-skinned person to slap around.

A thick-faced person is undeterred in the face of defeat. He does not let "inner battles" absorb his energy. If he is nervous or fearful, he channels this energy into productive power by focusing on a vision. In short, when negativity comes from the outside, it bounces off; if it comes from within, it is trapped, gagged and suffocated.

**Black Heart:** The quality of being passionately committed to the actions you must take to achieve a goal - while simultaneously showing no compassion or concern for how others are affected by those actions. A combat athlete with a black heart is a ruthless person. He may think highly of his opponent, but when the referee starts the bout, he is a competitive animal. He does not care how much his opponent wants to win. He does not care if his opponent cries when he loses. He does not care if his opponent has worked for many years to achieve the same goal. He wants to win more than anyone else - and he is going to win as impressively as he can ... and if his opponent is physically or emotionally crushed afterward, tough luck.

When I tell people about the importance of having a thick face and black heart, I occasionally hear comments like, "I disagree. You don't have to be mean in order to win." "It's not about being mean, although it could be," I answer. "Truth is, one of the meanest things you can do is whoop someone with a smile on your face; to destroy someone with kindness."

Thick face, black heart can be used for good or for evil. Naturally, I believe it is better for society when a person uses the principles of Thick Face, Black Heart for good purposes. But never lose sight of the fact that this is a quality that is used by saints as well as sociopaths.

All champion fighters have a thick face and a black heart. And so do all successful people.

Thick Face Black Heart is a warrior's philosophy. It is NOT how you choose to use this philosophy in your own life. It is neither good nor bad but it can be used for both. It is relevant in so many arenas from the sports world to the classroom to the boardroom. It is about a determined outlook on life that you will succeed no matter what obstacles are placed in your path.

There are 2 distinct elements that this concept addresses:

**Thick Face = The Shield**  
**Black Heart = The Spear**

Thick Face is a shield. It is a shield you use to protect yourself from the negative opinions of others. It is all about your faith in yourself, in your purpose, and in your ability to fight through any and all opposition to your goals. It is a pure form of 'turn the other cheek'. It is in fact an inner strength that allows you to ignore the critics. 'Don't sweat the small stuff'. Instead focus on your goals and achieve them because you continue on your journey when others would turn back.

Black Heart is a spear. It is truly a powerful weapon although you cannot touch it with your hands. It is the ability to take action with no regard to the manner in which your successes will affect others. A black heart is ruthless although not necessarily evil. It allows you to achieve goals that others fall short of because they are afraid to hurt someone's feelings. We cannot all be winners. Someone has to lose anytime someone else gets to win. And if you are concerned about the success rate of others, you will find it much tougher for you to win. Be true to yourself because ultimately your success is your number one priority.

Translating this to the football field creates champions. Most coaches are trying to teach these concepts when they teach young boys that you can 'be mean' when you take the field. They are trying to get the boys to understand that some of the rules they follow off the field are not nearly as important on the field.

You don't have to 'play nice' to be successful. You don't need to 'play dirty' either. Just 'play hard' and worry about yourself and your team and your goals. Give 100% and don't worry about what the critics tell you that you cannot do. Instead you should put those blinders on and focus on your goals. Make your blocks. Make every tackle. Run hard and get in the end zone. Win the game.

And when your opponent cries after they lose, do not taunt them but neither should you console them. You did your best to win and hopefully they did their best as well. Someone has to win and someone has to lose. There is no shame in either. The only shame is not doing your very best. And worrying about your opponent's feelings can cause you to fall short of your own goals. Because worrying about them, you cannot be fully focused on your own success. And your success should be your ultimate goal. This is the truth.

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