

Dr. Robert McGrath Says Men Over 40 Should Redefine What It Means to Compete

The former competitive hockey player and longevity professional says getting older does not have to mean losing your competitive edge, but it may require changing where you direct it.

Cherry Hill, New Jersey Sep 22, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - For men who have spent much of their lives competing, the transition into their 40s and beyond can create an unexpected question: What are you competing for now?

Dr. Robert McGrath believes the answer should evolve with age.

McGrath grew up playing competitive ice hockey, captained his prep school team at Trinity Pawling Preparatory School, trained at the Olympic Training Center in Marquette, Michigan, and later attended training camps with the Philadelphia Flyers and Pittsburgh Penguins. Today, as founder of The Barbell Doctor, he works in longevity, men's health, strength, and performance.

He says the competitive instinct that once drove him on the ice never disappeared. It simply found different outlets.

"I don't think the competitive instinct disappears when you stop playing a sport," McGrath said. "You just have to decide where to direct it. At 45 or 50, beating your 25-year-old self isn't necessarily the right competition. The better question is whether you're improving the person you are today."

Competition Does Not Need an Opponent

For many men, competition becomes less obvious after organized sports end. There is no scoreboard at the end of the week and no championship waiting at the end of the season.

McGrath believes that this can actually create an opportunity to define competition more intelligently.

Instead of comparing a current bench press to one from decades ago, a man might work toward becoming stronger than he was last year. Instead of chasing a particular appearance, he might focus on consistency in training, improving measurable health markers, or maintaining the physical ability to participate fully in life as he gets older.

The same principle can extend beyond physical health.

"Competition doesn't always have to mean beating somebody else," McGrath said. "Can you become more disciplined? Can you learn something difficult? Can you become better at your work without sacrificing the things that matter at home? Those are legitimate challenges."

For McGrath, the shift matters because aging changes the conditions under which people compete. Responsibilities increase. Recovery can change. Careers become more demanding. Families require time and attention.

Pretending those variables do not exist can turn competitiveness into frustration.

When Competition Becomes Ego

McGrath also cautions against assuming that being competitive automatically produces better results.

A man accustomed to pushing through discomfort may turn every workout into a test. He may resist reducing training volume when recovery is poor or compare himself with people 20 years younger. A previous personal record can become a standard he refuses to let go of.

McGrath sees a difference between refusing to become complacent and refusing to adapt.

“There is nothing wrong with wanting to perform at a high level,” he said. “The problem is when ego starts making the decisions. If you're constantly trying to prove that you can still train exactly the way you did at 25, you may be competing against a version of yourself that no longer exists.”

That does not mean lowering expectations. Instead, McGrath encourages men to create standards appropriate for the person they are becoming.

Putting the Scoreboard on Paper

McGrath applies that philosophy through a quarterly goal system.

He typically chooses goals across six areas of his life, drawing from categories such as career, money, health, family, personal growth, physical development, and spirituality.

Each goal goes onto an index card. The goal itself is written on the front, while the actions required to reach it are written on the back.

He then adds something familiar to any competitive person: stakes.

McGrath chooses a reward for accomplishing all six goals and gives it to an accountability partner to hold. Past rewards have included a motorcycle, furniture, and a fine watch. If he fails to complete the goals, he does not receive the reward and must complete a predetermined consequence that benefits somebody else.

Those consequences have included volunteering at an animal shelter, donating blood, or supporting a food bank.

“The system works for me because there is a scoreboard,” McGrath explained. “I know what I said I was going to accomplish, I know the actions required, and somebody besides me knows whether I followed through.”

He also maintains a larger three-to-five-year goal, which he calls his BHAG, or Big Hairy Audacious Goal. Unlike his quarterly goals, it has no immediate reward or penalty attached. It provides longer-term direction, while the quarterly goals create shorter checkpoints.

A Different Kind of Personal Best

McGrath believes men can retain the drive that served them earlier in life without becoming trapped by old definitions of achievement.

The scoreboard at 50 may look different from the scoreboard at 25. That does not necessarily make the competition easier.

Being physically capable decades from now, continuing to develop professionally, remaining present for family, learning new skills, and having the discipline to change an approach that no longer works can all provide meaningful standards.

“You don't have to stop being competitive because you're getting older,” McGrath said. “But you should become smarter about what winning actually means.”

About Dr. Robert McGrath

Dr. Robert McGrath is a Doctor of Chiropractic, entrepreneur, and founder of The Barbell Doctor, an online coaching platform that helps men over 40 address strength, recovery, nutrition, hormones, and long-term performance. He is also the founder of Integrated Health Consultants NJ LLC, a healthcare consulting company focused on longevity and medical aesthetics.

Raised in Southern New Jersey, McGrath competed in ice hockey at a high level after being born with two clubbed feet. His experiences in athletics, healthcare, and entrepreneurship continue to shape his approach to discipline, personal development, and longevity.

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