

The Joyful Athlete: The Wisdom of the Heart in Exercise And Sports Training (Beinhorn, George)

Expansive values of kindness, compassion, and love are prized in all spiritual traditions. They are universal. And it's impossible to talk about success in sports without mentioning these positive dimensions of the human heart.

It might take courage, because he'd have to become inwardly engrossed in pure play again, and less focused on external rewards.

Like Jordan and Pippen, we can make a conscious decision to turn sports, at our level, into a quest for expansion—an artistic performance, a daily celebration, a spiritual search for joy.

But there's solid scientific evidence that expansive attitudes contribute to athletic success, and not merely by distracting us from energy-draining negativity.

As 1972 Olympic marathon gold medalist Frank Shorter put it, "The marathon is too hard a race to waste energy hating your competitors." The same could be said of any difficult sport—life included.

The American nineteenth-century philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson was probably right when he described a "law of compensation" that rewards us according to our deeds.

Moreover, the notion that expansive feelings such as love and kindness promote health and improve performance is no longer an airy sentiment. It's been verified by the discovery of electrical and chemical pathways by which the effects of our positive and negative thoughts and feelings are carried to the most distant parts of our bodies, including the immune system, which is vitally involved in sports training and recovery.

Ogilvy found that the second-tier athletes tended to beat themselves up mentally for their mistakes, while the champions simply noted their errors and moved on, wasting no energy on self-recrimination. The top

players inwardly reviewed their flubs and quickly turned to the next task. Negative self-thoughts sap our energy. They are self-defeating.

“Masculinity, first and foremost, ought to be defined in terms of relationships,” Joe said. “It ought to be taught in terms of the capacity to love and to be loved. . . . And I think the second criterion—the only other criterion for masculinity—is that all of us ought to have some kind of cause, some kind of purpose in our lives that’s bigger than our own individual hopes, dreams, wants, and desires.”⁴

Ehrmann teaches his players a code of conduct that’s starkly at variance with the values most young athletes absorb. It includes accepting responsibility, leading courageously, and “enacting justice on behalf of others.” Ehrmann’s “Building Men for Others” program is based on empathy: “Not feeling for someone, but with someone.”

But training well is also complex, because it demands that we answer five tough questions: 1. Body. How can I fine-tune my training in harmony with my body’s ever-changing needs? 2. Heart. How can I find the joy of expansive feelings when I train? 3. Will. How can I train with strong will, without getting injured or over-trained? 4. Mind. How can I focus and quiet my mind, so I can enter the enjoyable sports “zone”? 5. Soul. How can I commune with the wisdom and joy of a higher intelligence when I exercise?

After all, their approach is practical. They tell us, for instance, that we have five instruments through which we can experience happiness: body, heart, will, mind, and soul.

The spiritual teachings encourage us to go with our strengths, while working to correct any imbalances.

Life places essentially the same choice continually before us: will we use our bodies wisely, or abuse them? our hearts, to love or to hate? our minds, to be wise or merely clever? Our spiritual instincts, to aspire or to dabble in psychic trivialities? History—ours and the world’s—is the story of the eternal struggle between these opposing forces in human nature.

To summarize: positive, harmonious feelings enhance mental focus, calmness, health, performance, intuition (as we'll see shortly), and the frequency of spiritual feelings. They increase relaxation, alpha-wave output in the brain (associated with a calm, meditative state), and synchronize heart-rhythm patterns, respiratory rhythms, and blood pressure oscillations.

I find it helps to remember that Frank Shorter ran all but about 20% of his weekly 140 miles at around 7:00 pace, which for him was very easy. (Shorter's marathon pace was 4:59.)

HeartMath researchers found that our hearts are able to work more efficiently, even at high running speeds, when we harmonize their rhythms with positive feelings such as love, kindness, compassion, and joy.

Achor realized that our traditional assumptions about happiness and success are backwards. Most people assume that they'll be happy after they achieve material success. But Achor found that the opposite is true—people who are happy from the get-go are far more likely to be successful in business, relationships, or sports.

Finding the energy to perform well isn't a question of beating-down our competitors, or cultivating feelings of brute dominance. It's about creating a powerful, positive flow of energy, accompanied by expansive feelings that can help our hearts, bodies, and brains perform at their best.

BrainMysteries, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases>

San Francisco Forty-Niner coach Bill Walsh's innovative style of football, which was based on efficient application of energy for the greatest possible gain with the least effort, primarily using high-percentage short passes, changed football (and sports) forever.

Lore of Running, it's always best to try to get the maximum training effect from the least effort. Training that increases, preserves, and wisely applies energy is good; training that wastes, depletes, or misapplies energy is counterproductive.

It absolutely requires energy to build a better body.

Of course, the science of energy has many dimensions—diet, sleep, distance, frequency, speed—all of which demand careful attention.

He found that by training very easily on his off-days, and taking many easy days, he could train very hard in his main workouts, and make faster progress than at any other time in his career. Not surprisingly, the elite Africans also train “very hard/very easy.”

Clarence Bass also found that the body loves variety. Again, no surprise. Changing our training helps us stay motivated and stimulates the body to improve.

The actions that have the highest value for humanity are those that expand happiness and decrease suffering. An immutable law of nature says that expansive actions always give us an inflow of joy.

The first is the reason most exercise is enjoyable: because it generates energy. Up to a point, the more energy we channel through our physical, mental, and emotional “systems,” the greater the enjoyment.

Feelings of enthusiasm are an amazingly accurate gauge for the pace our body can safely and optimally handle for a given distance, on a given day. But we need to check our hearts for the right kind of enthusiasm—it’s not the adolescent, emotional kind of excitement that always seems to lead us to do too much, but a calm, mature, controlled positive feeling.

The second factor that makes Lydiard’s training enjoyable is that when we do it correctly, we don’t over train. As I mentioned earlier, Lydiard urged his runners to finish every run feeling “pleasantly tired.” And he meant it. It was a cornerstone of his system. He believed that it’s important to leave some energy in the tank at the end of a run, because the body will use that “adaptation energy” to recover and improve. What’s the best way to increase your mileage safely and enjoyably?

The way to get more happiness is by loving more, serving more, living with greater energy, growing in wisdom, letting go of petty self-importance, and embracing a greater Self. That's the formula. How well it succeeds in the arts

A strong theme running throughout these books is that they're about expansive sports—the notion that positive energy, positive attitudes, and a focus on individual improvement lead to success.

Alyssa Roenigk in ESPN The Magazine. In "Lotus Pose on Two," Roenigk describes how coach Pete Carroll transformed the Seattle Seahawks into the best team in the NFL.

Bill Rodgers's Marathon Man, Alberto Salazar's 14 Minutes, and

Great coaches realize that a key to success is caring for the individual athlete. If the players are unhappy, feel disrespected, or are divided, the team will have greatly reduced chances of succeeding. Contractive attitudes divert energy or kill it.

Phil Jackson, in *Eleven Rings: My approach was always to relate to each player as a whole person, not just as a cog in the basketball machine. That meant pushing him to discover what distinct qualities he could bring to the game beyond taking shots and making passes. How much courage did he have? Or resilience? What about character under fire? Many players I've coached didn't look special on paper, but in the process of creating a role for themselves they grew into formidable champions. Derek Fisher is a prime example. He began as a backup point guard for the Lakers with average foot speed and shooting skills. But he worked tirelessly and transformed himself into an invaluable clutch performer and one of the best leaders I've ever coached.*

At the start of every season I always encouraged players to focus on the journey rather than the goal. What matters most is playing the game the right way and having the courage to grow, as human beings as well as basketball players. When you do that, the ring takes care of itself.

Ultramarathoners have a wonderful acronym: “RFP.” It means Relentless Forward Progress.

Abrashoff interviewed each of Benfold’s 310 crew members personally, asking them about their backgrounds, their life goals, what they hoped to get out of their time in the Navy, and what they felt was wrong with the Navy’s way of doing things.

They talk about how the U.S. runners are so serious about their training, how obsessed they are with numbers and technology, and how it’s all geared toward some feverishly imagined tomorrow. Meanwhile, the Kenyans are intent on maximizing the joys of today.

When Abrashoff left Benfold, he studied surveys conducted by the Navy to discover why people weren’t re-enlisting. Surprisingly, low pay was the fifth reason. “The top reason was not being treated with respect or dignity; second was being prevented from making an impact on the organization; third, not being listened to; and fourth, not being rewarded with more responsibility.”

It’s a culture that engenders good feelings in each runner and within the team. Aris persuades his runners to tap the joys of training for something larger than themselves.

“When our kids train and or race, they do so for each other rather than competing against each other. When one releases themselves from the limiting constraints of individual achievement alone, new worlds open up in terms of group AND individual potential and its fulfillment. . . . Each is capable of standing on their own, but when working together so much more is accomplished both for the group and individual. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts basically, nothing new here. “Next, I would suggest the notion of contribution rather than participation. By this I mean that each kid on our team has an opportunity to contribute to the overall good rather than to merely participate in the process. In this way, regardless of whatever level on the team a kid may be in terms of ability or competitive success, each strives to see themselves as giving something worthwhile of themselves to improve our process, rather than to merely participate or take from

the program. Simply put, giving versus taking. All of this is program-wide, inclusive of both the boys and girls I coach.”³⁴

And that’s too bad, because there’s solid scientific evidence that the heart can work harder, with less strain, in the presence of happy feelings.

His genius is helping moderately talented kids realize their potential.

Siqueiros had a defining quality of great teachers: he put the student’s needs first. He looked beyond short-term success and managed Jordan’s training for the long haul. He was more concerned that she be healthy and happy, than that she win races and set records. As a result, Hasay looked as fresh and enthusiastic in her final Footlocker race as she had four years earlier.

It’s silly to fear that we won’t get it right the first time. Better to plunge ahead with enthusiasm and fix things as we go.

A rule says, “you must do it this way.” A principle says, “This works ... and has through all remembered time.” The difference is crucial. . . .

Wabi-sabi represents a comprehensive Japanese world view or aesthetic centered on the acceptance of transience. . . . Characteristics of the wabi-sabi aesthetic include asymmetry, asperity, simplicity, modesty, intimacy, and suggest a natural process.