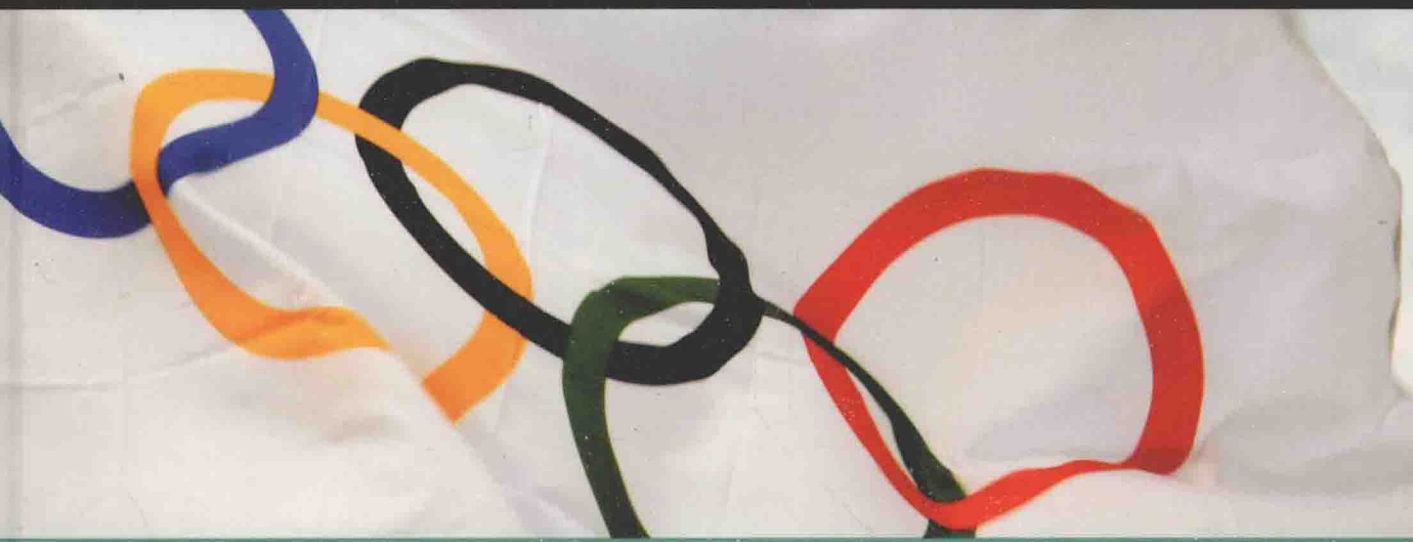
GREAT ATHLETES



OLYMPIC SPORTS

GREAT ATHLETES

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Volume 1

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Publisher's Note

The four volumes of *Great Athletes: Olympic Sports* are part of Salem Press's greatly expanded and redesigned *Great Athletes* series, which also includes self-contained volumes on baseball, basketball, boxing and soccer, football, golf and tennis, and racing and individual sports. The full 13-volume series presents articles on the lives, sports careers, and unique achievements of 1,470 outstanding competitors and champions in the world of sports. These athletes—many of whom have achieved world renown—represent more than 75 different nations and territories and more than 80 different sports. Their stories are told in succinct, 1,000-word-long profiles accessible in tone and style to readers in grades 7 and up.

The 13 *Great Athletes* volumes, which include a cumulative index volume, are built on the work of three earlier Salem Press publications designed for middle and high school readers—the 20 slender volumes of *The Twentieth Century: Great Athletes* (1992), their 3-volume supplement (1994), and the 8 stouter volumes of *Great Athletes, Revised* (2002). This new 13-volume edition retains articles on every athlete covered in those earlier editions and adds more than 415 entirely new articles—a 40 percent increase—to bring the overall total to 1,470 articles.

The present four volumes add 124 new articles to the 354 in the previous edition to cover a total of 478 athletes in Olympic sports—an increase of 35 percent. The content of other articles has been reviewed and updated as necessary, with many articles substantially revised, expanded, or replaced, and the bibliographical citations for virtually all articles have been updated. Information in every article is current up to the beginning of Spring, 2009.

Scope of Coverage

Since the modern Olympic movement began in 1896, the Summer and Winter Olympic Games have offered competitions in a great variety of individual sports, some of which are covered in other *Great Athletes* volumes on baseball, basketball, boxing, soccer, golf, and tennis. It should also be pointed out that the athletes covered within *Great Athletes: Olympic Sports* have achieved greatness in *sports* that are, or have been, part of the Olympics. However, not all these athletes were themselves Olympians. This is particularly true for the handful of cricket, lacrosse, and rugby players covered here. Ice hockey has been an even more integral part of the Winter Olympics since 1920. It is included in these volumes, although most of its big-name players never participated in the Olympics.

Criteria for Inclusion

In selecting new names to add to *Great Athletes: Olympic Sports*, first consideration was given to athletes whose extraordinary achievements have made their names household words in North America. These names include such undeniable legends as the early twentieth century American sprint star Jackson Scholz, Finnish hockey stars Jari Kurri and Teemu Selänne, and Canadian figure skater Elvis Stojko. Consideration was next given to currently active champion athletes who may be destined for even greater achievements. Examples of the many young athletes who fall into this category include Usain Bolt, the Jamaican sprinter who was a sensation at the 2008 Summer Olympics; Kirsty Coventry, the only swimmer from tropical Africa ever to win an Olympic medal; American gymnasts Shawn Johnson and Nastia Liukin; American speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno, and American swimming sensation Michael Phelps.

Organization

With the exception of a small number of articles about figure-skating pairs, a two-man beach volleyball team, and the Soviet track stars Tamara and Irina Press, each article covers the life and career of a single athlete, and all names are arranged in one alphabetical stream. Every article is accompanied by at least one boxed table, summarizing the career statistics, honors and awards, records, and other milestones that set apart each great player. Most articles are also accompanied by photographs of their subjects. Every article also lists up-to-date bibliographical notes under the heading "Additional Sources." These sections list from three to five

readily available books and articles containing information pertinent to the athlete and sport covered in the article. Appendixes in volume 4 contain additional sources in published books and Web sites.

Averaging three pages in length, each article is written in clear language and presented in a uniform, easily readable format. All articles are divided into four subheaded sections that cover the athlete's life and achievements chronologically.

- *Early Life* presents such basic biographical information as vital dates, parentage, siblings, and early education. It also sketches the social milieu in which the athlete grew up and discusses other formative experiences.

- *The Road to Excellence* picks up where the athlete's earliest serious involvement in sports began. This section describes experiences and influences that shaped the subject's athletic prowess and propelled the athlete toward greatness. These sections also often discuss obstacles—such as poverty, discrimination, and physical disabilities—that many great athletes have had to overcome.

- *The Emerging Champion* traces the subject's advance from the threshold of sports stardom to higher levels of achievement. This section explains the characteristics and circumstances that combined to make the athlete among the best in the world in his or her sport.

- *Continuing the Story* tracks the athlete's subsequent career, examining how the athlete may have set new goals and had achievements that inspired others. This section also offers insights into the athlete's life away from sports. Readers will also learn about the innovations and contributions that athletes have made to their sports and, in many cases, to society at large.

- *Summary* recapitulates the subject's story, paying special attention to honors that the subject has won and to the human qualities that have made the athlete special in the world of sports.

Appendixes

At the back of volume 4, readers will find 18 appendixes, most of which are entirely new to this edition. The appendixes are arranged under these three headings:

- *Resources* contains a bibliography of recently published books on the Olympic Games and their various sports, a categorized listing of sites on the World Wide Web, a Glossary defining many of the specialized terms used in essays, and a Time Line that lists names of all the players covered in essays in order of their birth dates.

- *Halls of Fame* has lists of members of 11 different halls of fame.

- *Annual Awards and Honors* has lists of IAAF and USOC athletes of the year and all Olympic decathlon champions.

The *Cumulative Indexes* volume, which accompanies the full *Great Athletes* series, includes every appendix found in this and other volumes on specific sports, *plus* additional appendixes containing information that pertains to all sports. These appendixes include a general bibliography, a comprehensive Web site list, a Time Line integrating the names of all 1,470 athletes in *Great Athletes*, 2 lists of the greatest athletes of the twentieth century, 3 multisport halls of fame, and 10 different athlete-of-the-year awards.

Indexes

Following the Appendixes in *Great Athletes: Olympic Sports*, readers will find three indexes listing athletes by their names, countries, and sports. Because some athletes have competed in more than one sport, readers may wish also to consult the *Cumulative Indexes* volume. Its sport, country, and name indexes list all the athletes covered in the full *Great Athletes* series.

Acknowledgments

Once again, Salem Press takes great pleasure in thanking the 383 scholars and experts who wrote and updated the articles making *Great Athletes* possible. Their names can be found at the ends of the

articles they have written and in the list of contributors that follows the "Introduction." We also take immense pleasure in again thanking our special consultant, Rafer Johnson, for bringing his unique insights to this project. As an Olympic champion and world record-holder in track and field's demanding decathlon, he has experienced an extraordinarily broad range of physical and mental challenges at the highest levels of competition. Moreover, he has a lifetime of experience working with, and closely observing, athletes at every level—from five-year-old soccer players to Olympic and professional champions. He truly understands what constitutes athletic greatness and what is required to achieve it. For this reason, readers will not want to overlook his "Introduction."

Acronyms Used in Articles

Salem's general practice is to use acronyms only after they have been explained within each essay. Because of the frequency with which many terms appear in *Great Athletes: Olympic Sports*, that practice is partly suspended for the acronyms listed below:

AAU Amateur Athletic Union
ESPN Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
IAAF International Association of Athletics Federations
IOC International Olympic Committee
NCAA National Collegiate Athletic Association
NHL National Hockey League

Introduction

Five decades after reaching my own pinnacle of success in sports, I still get a thrill watching other athletes perform. I have competed with and against some of the greatest athletes in the world, watched others up close and from a distance, and read about still others. I admire the accomplishments of all of them, for I know something of what it takes to achieve greatness in sports, and I especially admire those who inspire others.

This revised edition of *Great Athletes* provides a wonderful opportunity for young readers to learn about the finest athletes of the modern era of sports. Reading the stories of the men and women in these pages carries me back to my own youth, when I first began playing games and became interested in sports heroes. Almost all sports interested me, but I gravitated to baseball, basketball, football, and track and field. Eventually, I dedicated most of my young adult years to track and field's decathlon, which I loved because its ten events allowed me to use many different skills.

Throughout those years, one thing remained constant: I wanted to *win*. To do that meant being the best that I could be. I wondered what I could learn from the lives of great athletes. From an early age I enjoyed reading about sports champions and wondered how they did as well as they did. What traits and talents did the greatest of them have? I gradually came to understand that the essence of greatness in sports lies in competition. In fact, the very word *athlete* itself goes back to a Greek word for "competitor." Being competitive is the single most important attribute any athlete can have, but other traits are important, too. Readers may gain insights into the athletes covered in these volumes by considering the ten events of the decathlon as symbols of ten traits that contribute to athletic greatness. All champions have at least a few of these traits; truly great champions have most of them.

Speed and Quickness

Decathlon events are spread over two days, with five events staged on each day. The first event is always the 100-meter dash—one of the most glamorous events in track and field. Men and women—such as Usain Bolt and Florence Griffith-Joyner—who capture its world records are considered the fastest humans on earth. In a race that lasts only a few seconds, speed is everything, and there is no room for mistakes.

Appropriately, speed is the first of the three standards of athletic excellence expressed in the Olympic motto, *Citius, altius, fortius* (faster, higher, stronger). Its importance in racing sports such as cycling, rowing, running, speed skating, swimming, and the triathlon is obvious: Athletes who reach the finish line soonest win; those who arrive later lose. Speed is also important in every sport that requires moving around a lot, such as baseball, basketball, boxing, football, handball, soccer, tennis, volleyball, water polo, and virtually all the events of track and field. The best athletes in these sports are usually fast.

Athletes who lack speed generally make up for it in other kinds of quickness. For example, while running speed has helped make some football quarterbacks—such as Vince Young—great, some quarterbacks who are slow afoot have achieved greatness with other forms of quickness. Joe Namath is an example. Although he was embarrassingly slow on his feet, he read opposing teams' defenses so fast that he could make lightning-quick decisions and release his passes faster than almost any other quarterback who played the game.

As important as speed is, there are a few sports in which it means little. Billiards, bowling, and golf, for example, all permit competitors to take considerable time responding to opponents' moves. Even so, speed can be important where one may least expect it. For example, major chess competitions are clocked, and making moves too slowly can cost players games.

Courage

The decathlon's second event, the long jump, represents one of the purest contests in sports: Competitors simply run up to a mark and jump as far as they can. Each jumper gets several tries, and only the best marks matter. While it sounds simple,

it involves critical little things that can go wrong and ruin one's chance of winning. When the great Jesse Owens jumped in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, for example, he missed his takeoff mark so many times that he risked disqualification. What saved him was the encouragement of a rival German jumper, who advised him to start his jump from well behind the regular takeoff mark. It takes courage to overcome the fear of making mistakes and concentrate on jumping. It also takes courage to overcome the fear of injury.

A great athlete may have abundant courage but rarely need to call upon it. However, most truly great athletes eventually face moments when they would fail if their courage abandoned them. In fact, courage is often what separates being good from being great. True courage should not be confused with the absence of fear, for it is the ability to overcome fear, including the very natural fears of injury and pain. A wonderful example is gymnast Kerri Strug's amazing spirit in the 1996 Olympics. Ignoring the pain of torn ligaments and a serious ankle sprain, she helped the U.S. women win a team gold medal by performing her final vault at great personal risk.

Some sports challenge athletes with real and persistent threats of serious injuries and even death. Among the most dangerous are alpine skiing, auto racing, boxing, football, horse racing, mountaineering, and rodeo—all of which have killed and disabled many fine athletes. No one can achieve greatness in such sports without exceptional courage.

Consider also the courage required to step up to bat against a baseball pitcher who throws hardballs mere inches away from your head at speeds of more than ninety miles an hour. Or, imagine preparing to dive from atop a 10-meter platform, resting only on your toes, with your heels projecting over the edge, knowing that your head will pass within inches of the rock-hard edge of the platform. Greg Louganis once cut his head open on such a dive. After he had his scalp stitched up, he returned to continue diving into a pool of water colored pink by his own blood. He won the competition.

Another kind of courage is needed to perform in the face of adversity that may have nothing to do with sport itself. The best known example of that kind of courage is the immortal Jackie Robinson, who broke the color line in baseball in 1947. As the first African American player in the modern major leagues, Jackie faced criticism, verbal harassment, and even physical abuse almost everywhere he played. He not only persevered but also had a career that would have been regarded as exceptional even if his color had never been an issue.

Strength

The shot put, the decathlon's third event, requires many special traits, but the most obvious is strength. The metal ball male shot putters heave weighs 16 pounds—more than an average bowling ball. Agility, balance, and speed are all important to the event, but together they can accomplish nothing without great strength. Strength is also the third standard expressed in the Olympic motto, *Citius, altius, fortius.*

Strength is especially valuable in sports that put competitors in direct physical contact with each other—sports such as basketball, boxing, football, and wrestling. Whenever athletes push and pull against each other, the stronger generally prevail. Strength is also crucial in sports requiring lifting, pulling, pushing, paddling, or propelling objects, or controlling vehicles or animals. Such sports include auto racing, baseball and softball, bodybuilding and weightlifting, canoeing and kayaking, golf, horse racing, rowing, and all track and field throwing events.

One sport in which the role of strength has never been underestimated is wrestling. One of the most impressive demonstrations of strength in the sport occurred at the 2000 Olympic Games at Sydney when Rulon Gardner, in a performance of a lifetime, defeated former Olympic champion Aleksandr Karelin in the super-heavyweight class of Greco-Roman wrestling.

Visualization

Visualization is the ability to see what one needs to do before actually doing it. Perhaps no sport better exemplifies its importance than the high jump—the decathlon's fourth event. In contrast to the long jump and throwing events—in which competitors strive to maximize distance in every effort, the high jump (like the pole vault) sets a bar at a fixed height that competitors must clear. Before jumping, they take time to study the bar and visualize what they must do to clear it. If the bar is set at 7 feet, a jump of 6 feet 11¾ inches fails; a jump of 8

feet succeeds, but counts only for 7 feet. To conserve strength for later jumps, jumpers must carefully calculate how much effort to exert at each height, and to do this, they must be able to visualize.

Great baseball and softball batters also visualize well. Before pitches even reach the plate, batters see the balls coming and visualize their bats hitting them. Likewise, great golfers see their balls landing on the greens before they even swing. Soccer players, such as Ronaldo, see the balls going into the goal before they even kick them. Billiard players, such as Jeanette Lee, see all the balls moving on the table before they even touch the cue balls. Bowlers, like Lisa Wagner, see the pins tumbling down before they release their balls.

Visualization is especially important to shooters, such as Lones Wigger, and archers, such as Denise Parker and Jay Barrs, who know exactly what their targets look like, as well as the spots from where they will fire, before they even take aim. In contrast to most other sports, they can practice in conditions almost identical to those in which they compete. However, the athletes against whom they compete have the same advantage, so the edge usually goes to those who visualize better.

Players in games such as basketball, hockey, soccer, and water polo fire upon fixed targets from constantly changing positions—often in the face of opponents doing everything they can to make them miss. Nevertheless, visualization is important to them as well. In basketball, players are said to be in a "groove," or a "zone," when they visualize shots so well they seem unable to miss. Kobe Bryant and Lisa Leslie are among the greatest visualizers in their sport, just as Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron, and Albert Pujols have been great at visualizing home runs in baseball. In tennis, I always admired Arthur Ashe's knack for planning matches in his mind, then systematically dismantling his opponents.

At another level, boxer Muhammad Ali was great at visualizing his entire future. Big, strong, and quick and able to move with the best of them, he had it all. I had the great pleasure of touring college campuses with him after we both won gold medals at the Rome Olympics in 1960. Muhammad (then known as Cassius Clay) had visualized his Olympic victory before it happened, and when I first knew him he was already reciting poetry and predicting what the future held for him. He saw it all in advance and called every move—something he became famous for later, when he taunted opponents by predicting the rounds in which he would knock them out.

Determination and Resilience

The final event of the first day of decathlon competition is the 400-meter run. Almost exactly a quarter mile, this race stands at the point that divides sprints from middle-distances. Should runners go all out, as in a sprint, or pace themselves, as middle-distance runners do? Coming as it does, as the last event of the exhausting first day of decathlon competition, the 400-meter race tests the mettle of decathletes by extracting one last great effort from them before they can rest up for the next day's grueling events. How they choose to run the race has to do with how determined they are to win the entire decathlon.

Every great athlete who wants to be a champion must have the determination to do whatever it takes to achieve that goal. Even so, determination alone is not enough. This was proven dramatically when basketball's Michael Jordan—whom journalists later voted the greatest athlete of the twentieth century—quit basketball in 1994 to fulfill his lifelong dream to play professional baseball. Despite working hard, he spent a frustrating season and a half in the minor leagues and merely proved two things: that determination alone cannot guarantee success, and that baseball is a more difficult sport than many people had realized.

Resilience, an extension of determination, is the ability to overcome adversity, or apparently hopeless situations, and to bounce back from outright defeat. Some might argue that no one can be greater than an athlete who never loses; however, athletes who continually win are never required to change what they do or do any soul searching. By contrast, athletes who lose must examine themselves closely and consider making changes. I have always felt that true greatness in sports is exemplified by the ability to come back from defeat, as heavyweight boxer Floyd Patterson did after losing his world title to Ingemar Johansson in a humiliating 3-round knockout in 1959. Only those athletes who face adversity and defeat can prove they have resilience.

Among athletes who have impressed me the most with their determination and resilience is

speed skater Eric Heiden, who was not only the first American to win world speed-skating championships, but the first speed skater ever to win all five events in the Winter Olympics. Another amazingly determined athlete is Jim Abbott, who refused to allow the fact that he was born with only one hand stop him from becoming a Major League Baseball pitcher—one who even pitched a no-hit game. Who could not admire Bo Jackson? An all-star in both professional football and Major League Baseball, he suffered what appeared to be a career-ending football injury. After undergoing hip-joint replacement surgery, he defied all logic by returning to play several more seasons of baseball. Cyclist Lance Armstrong also falls into this category. He won multiple Tour de France championships after recovering from cancer.

Execution

Day two of the decathlon opens with the technically challenging 110-meter high hurdles. A brutally demanding event, it requires speed, leaping ability, and perfect timing. In short, it is an event that requires careful execution—the ability to perform precisely when it matters. Sports differ greatly in the precision of execution they demand. Getting off great throws in the discus, shot put, and javelin, for example, requires superb execution, but the direction in which the objects go is not critical. By contrast, archers, shooters, and golfers must hit precise targets. Some sports not only demand that execution be precise but also that it be repeated. A baseball pitcher who throws two perfect strikes fails if the opposing batter hits the third pitch over the fence. Likewise, a quarterback who leads his team down the field with five consecutive perfect passes fails if his next pass is intercepted.

Consider the differences between the kind of execution demanded by diving and pole vaulting. Divers lose points if their toes are not straight the moment they enter the water. By contrast, pole vaulters can land any way they want, so long as they clear the bar. Moreover, a diver gets only one chance on each dive, while pole vaulters get three chances at each height they attempt—and they can even skip certain heights to save energy for later jumps at greater heights. On the other hand, a diver who executes a dive badly will merely get a poor score, while a pole vaulter who misses too many jumps will get no score at all—which is exactly what happened to decathlete Dan O'Brien in the 1992 U.S. Olympic Trials. Although Dan was the world's top decathlete at that time, his failure to clear a height in the pole vault kept him off the Olympic team. (To his credit, he came back to win a gold medal in 1996.)

Figure skating and gymnastics are other sports that measure execution with a microscope. In gymnastics, the standard of perfection is a score of ten—which was first achieved in the Olympics by Nadia Comăneci in 1976. However, scores in those sports are not based on objective measures but on the evaluations of judges, whose own standards can and do change. By contrast, archery, shooting, and bowling are unusual in being sports that offer objective standards of perfection. In bowling, that standard is the 300 points awarded to players who bowl all strikes.

Among all athletes noted for their execution, one in particular stands out in my estimation: golf's Tiger Woods. After Tiger had played professionally for only a few years, he established himself as one of the greatest golfers ever. He has beaten the best that golf has had to offer by record margins in major competitions, and wherever he plays, he is the favorite to win. Most impressive is his seeming ability to do whatever he needs to win, regardless of the situation. Few athletes in any sport, or in any era, have come close to matching Tiger's versatile and consistent execution.

Focus

After the high hurdles, the decathlon's discus event is a comparative relief. Nevertheless, it presents its own special demands, one of which is focus—the ability to maintain uninterrupted concentration. Like shot putters, discus throwers work within a tiny circle, within which they must concentrate all their attention and all their energy into throwing the heavy disk as far as they can.

Not surprisingly, one of the greatest discus throwers in history, Al Oerter, was also one of the greatest examples of focus in sports. His four gold medals between 1956 and 1968 made him the first track and field athlete in Olympic history to win any event four times in a row. In addition to beating out the best discus throwers in the world four consecutive times, he improved his own performance at each Olympiad and even won with a serious rib injury in 1964. Eight years after retiring from compe-

tition, he returned at age forty to throw the discus farther than ever and earn a spot as an alternate on the 1980 U.S. Olympic team.

Important in all sports, focus is especially important in those in which a single lapse in concentration may result in instant defeat. In boxing, a knockout can suddenly end a bout. Focus may be even more crucial in wrestling. Wrestlers grapple each other continuously, probing for openings that will allow them to pin their opponents. Few sports match wrestling in nonstop intensity; a single split-second lapse on the part of a wrestler can spell disaster. Great wrestlers, such as Cael Sanderson and Aleksandr Karelin, must therefore rank among the most focused athletes in history.

Balance and Coordination

Of all the decathlon events, the most difficult to perform is the pole vault. Think of what it entails: Holding long skinny poles, vaulters run at full speed down a narrow path toward a pit; then, without breaking stride, push the tips of their poles into a tiny slot, propel their bodies upward, and use the poles to flip themselves over bars more than two or three times their height above the ground, finally to drop down on the opposite side. Success in the pole vault demands many traits, but the most important are balance and coordination. Vaulters use their hands, feet, and bodies, all at the same time, and do everything at breakneck speed, with almost no margin for error. There are no uncoordinated champion pole vaulters.

Despite its difficulty, pole vaulting is an event in which some decathletes have performed especially well—perhaps because they, as a group, have versatile skills. I have long taken pride in the fact that my close friend, college teammate, and Olympic rival, C. K. Yang, once set a world record in the pole vault during a decathlon. C. K.'s record was all the more impressive because he achieved it midway through the second day of an intense competition. Imagine what balance and coordination he must have had to propel his body over the record-breaking height after having subjected it to the wear and tear of seven other events.

I cannot think of any athlete, in any sport, who demonstrated more versatility in coordination and balance than Michael Jordan, who could seemingly score from any spot on the floor, at any time, and under any conditions. Not only did he always have his offensive game together, he was also one of the greatest defensive players in the game. Moreover, his mere presence brought balance to his entire team.

Preparation

The ninth event of the decathlon is the javelin—a throwing event that goes back to ancient times. A more difficult event than it may appear to be, it requires more than its share of special preparation. This may be why we rarely see athletes who compete in both the javelin and other events, though the versatile Babe Didrikson Zaharias was an exception.

Along with determination—to which it is closely allied—preparation is a vital trait of great athletes, especially in modern competition. It is no longer possible for even the greatest natural athletes to win against top competition without extensive preparation, which means practice, training for strength and stamina, proper diet and rest, and studying opponents diligently. Football players, especially quarterbacks and defensive backs, spend hours before every game studying films of opponents.

I was fortunate to grow up with an athlete who exemplifies preparation: my younger brother, Jimmy Johnson, who would become defensive back for the San Francisco 49ers for seventeen years and later be elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Every week, Jimmy had to face a completely different set of pass receivers, but he was always ready because he studied their moves and trained himself to run backward fast enough to keep offenses in front of him so he could see every move they made. Coach Tom Landry of the Dallas Cowboys once told me that he always had the Cowboys attack on the side opposite from Jimmy.

Another exceptionally well prepared athlete was Magic Johnson, the great Lakers basketball guard, who played every position on the floor in more than one game. During his rookie season he had one of the greatest performances in playoff history during the NBA Finals. When a health problem prevented the Lakers' great center, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, from playing in the sixth game against Philadelphia, Magic stunned everyone by filling in for him at center and scoring 44 points. He went on to become one of the great point guards in basketball history because he always knew where every player on the court should be at every moment.

Stamina

If there is one event that most decathletes dread, it is the grueling 1,500-meter race that concludes the two-day competition. While C. K. Yang once set a world-record in the pole vault during a decathlon, no decathlete has ever come close to anything even resembling a world-class mark in the 1,500 meters. On the other hand, it is probable that no world-class middle-distance runner has ever run a 1,500-meter race immediately after competing in nine other events. To win a decathlon, the trick is not to come in first in this final race, but simply to survive it. For decathletes, it is not so much a race as a test of stamina.

When I competed in the decathlon in the Rome Olympics of 1960, I had to go head-to-head against my friend C. K. Yang through nine events, all the while knowing that the gold medal would be decided in the last event—the 1,500 meters. C. K. was one of the toughest and most durable athletes I have ever known, and I realized I could not beat him in that race. However, after the javelin, I led by enough points so that all I had to do was stay close to him. I managed to do it and win the gold medal, but running that race was not an experience I would care to repeat.

Stamina is not really a skill, but a measure of the strength to withstand or overcome exhaustion. Rare is the sport that does not demand some stamina. Stamina can be measured in a single performance—such as a long-distance race—in a tournament, or in the course of a long season.

The classic models of stamina are marathon runners, whose 26-plus-mile race keeps them moving continuously for more than two hours. Soccer is one of the most demanding of stamina among team sports. Its players move almost constantly and may run as far as 5 miles in a 90-minute game that allows few substitutions. Basketball players run nearly as much as soccer players, but their games are shorter and allow more substitutions and rest periods. However, the sport can be even more tiring than soccer because its teams play more frequently and play more games overall. Baseball players provide yet another contrast. They spend a great deal of time during their games sitting on the bench, and when they are on the field, players other than the pitcher and catcher rarely need to exert themselves more than a few seconds at a time. However, their season has the most games of all, and their constant travel is draining. All these sports and others demand great stamina from their players, and their greatest players are usually those who hold up the best.

To most people, chess seems like a physically undemanding game. However, its greatest players must be in top physical condition to withstand the unrelenting mental pressure of tournament and match competitions, which can last for weeks. Bobby Fisher, one of the game's greatest—and most eccentric—champions, exercised heavily when he competed in order to stay in shape. Even sprinters who spend only 10 or 11 seconds on the track in each race, need stamina. In order to reach the finals of major competitions, they must endure the physical and mental strains of several days of preliminary heats.

In reducing what makes athletes great to just ten traits, I realize that I have oversimplified things, but that matters little, as my purpose here is merely to introduce readers to what makes the athletes in these volumes great. Within these pages you will find stories exemplifying many other traits, and that is good, as among the things that make athletes endlessly fascinating are their diversity and complexity.

Rafer Johnson

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