

Use the Olympics to get you moving  
by Mike DeCinti

OK I admit it, my wife Alison and I are Olympic junkies. We can't get enough. From the opening ceremonies until the final medals are awarded, we are all about the Olympics. I mean they only come around every two years, and even then, it's three weeks of action before they're gone again. And it's not just the competitions either that we crave. We love the human-interest stories too. Michael Phelps setting an Olympic record, Dara Torres competing at age 41, and our undefeated softball and beach volleyball teams. Every sport seems to have that athlete with an inspiring story that can't help but make you want to just get outside and do something. Sure, it may be too late for the majority of us to start thinking about an Olympic dream now, but there shouldn't be anything stopping us from at least getting involved in some type of physical activity to get healthy.

With this in mind, I started surfing the web to see if there are people out there like us who use these games as a way to motivate ourselves to keep striving to reach our own personal goals. I came across a survey asking just that question. Have the Olympics inspired you to get out there and start getting fit? These are some actually posts from people who responded to that survey.

- “Whenever I watch the Olympics, I always feel like it's time to take over the world, take action on something... and that something is usually working out!”
- “Yes! I have been working out for a while now, but the Olympics were just what I needed to get excited again.”
- “Absolutely. Watching the Olympics has inspired me to work harder to achieve the body that I want.”
- “Definitely! Lately, when I do my little routine in the morning I think to myself, Wow, you think this is hard? Think about the workouts that the Olympians have to keep up with!" And then I'm motivated to work even harder.”

I particularly like that last one, because I have often thought that myself. During my triathlon training, I often think about those exceptional athletes in the sport and what they have to go through and usually that helps me give just a little bit more. However you don't have to be “training” for any specific sport or event to use the Olympics as a motivation. Instead use the mentality of an Olympian as an example to help you through whatever it is you are doing to stay healthy.

Performance psychologist Simon Middlemas says that Olympic research consistently suggests, “Successful athletes and teams attribute their performances to mental preparation, team cohesion, distraction control and sophisticated planning. Being willing to accept the roller coaster and planning for it will go a long way in preparing the athletes to cope effectively with the potential distractions at the Games.”

So what does that mean to you and me? Well let's take it one point at a time. First he mentions mental preparation. Before you can begin even the simplest of exercise routines, you have to first be in the right frame of mind. You have to want to get

healthy. If you don't first address any mental roadblocks you may have, there's no way you'll be able to handle the actual obstructions that are eventually going to pop up. Saying you want to be healthy, or that you need to eat right may not be what it takes to get you on that path. You may first need to look at why you don't eat right or why you're not healthy. Is there more to your lifestyle than just inactivity or a poor diet? And why haven't you been able to follow through on previous attempts to get healthy? You need to take your time and decide that you're ready and make a commitment to yourself.

Second, team cohesion. This one is simple. Surround yourself with like-minded people who may want to accomplish similar goals, but more importantly want to help you achieve your goals. Make it a family affair. Exercise with your spouse, your children, friends and coworkers or join a fitness center and participate in an exercise class. All of these are ways of helping you stay on task, because the people around you want the same thing you do.

Third is distraction control. As I mentioned in point number one distractions are going to happen. There's no way around it. Work, meetings, illnesses and a parade of other distractions are going to come at you all the time. Do as much as you can to anticipate problems and avoid them. If you know you have to go to your child's soccer game after work, make sure you get up early enough to walk in the morning. Have an office party to go to? Make sure you don't go hungry so you won't over indulge at the buffet.

Finally sophisticated planning. This simply means that you need to plan out what it is you want to do. Set goals, organize a plan and visualize yourself working to achieve those goals. However, be realistic. Remember, it may have been an Olympic athlete that actually motivated you enough to start this new healthy lifestyle but don't try to go out the next day and set any Olympic records.

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