

GOAL IS GOLD

GOAL IS GOLD

*The Secret of the Most Inspiring
Olympic Champions & Coaches*

VICKRANT MAHAJAN



Superpositivity
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Yes Thank You Universe

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Conscious Choice

This is a book about activating the energy of conscious choices in life. Commensurate with the theme, you will find a stylistic variation in this book:

- ~ It is a global practice to write you, us, we and they in lowercase but I in uppercase. I realise that it's an unconscious usage, an unaware assertion of one's supremacy. For, if i is uppercased then so should you, she, he, they. Why not make it simpler? By applying the same rule to all personal pronouns. So, throughout this book, i have consciously used i in the lowercase. The only exception being whenever it occurs at the beginning of a sentence to maintain editorial consistency, and a few other instances midsentence where I is deliberately used to denote the ego.

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For the immeasurably beautiful gift of life, i am ever-increasingly grateful to:

The Universe and its energy, that lives on infinitely in my consciousness.

My parents, Veenaa and Sham Kishore, and my sister, Niddhi, for their unlimited love and support.

The 108 billion human beings that have ever lived, the 7.5 billion that live today, the trillions of plants and the octillions of other life forms throughout the cosmos, who have all contributed to my superawesome journey on this planet. I am the oneness of them all.

Introduction

I started writing this book on 22 March 2023 — the 20th anniversary of a motivational journey that had started with me on the podium of Grasim Mr India on 22 March 2003. That day, at the Andheri Sports Complex in Mumbai, i'd won the first runner-up and Mr Photogenic trophies at India's biggest male modelling pageant. It was the first big goal i'd achieved in my life, and i was obviously very happy — out of 15,000 contestants, i'd managed to come second. Plus, considering that i was a full-time editor at HarperCollins Publishers — an “intellectual” desk job — it was quite an accomplishment, given that i was competing with the brawniest models in the country.

However, it wasn't until a few months later, when i was writing a self-help book called *Model Dreams* about personality pageants, that i had a reality check. While i

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was goading and inspiring future aspirants to set the ultimate goal of winning the pageant, i realised that i hadn't done the same thing myself! To be honest, my goal was to be in the top 3 at the pageant — i did not aspire to actually win it. Now, if you were present at the actual event, judging by the thunderous audience applause and judges' reaction at my final answer, you'd have said that i "deserved" to win. Maybe i did — and for a while i was indeed cleaved by the feeling that i'd been wronged. But the exercise of writing that book put things into perspective for me. I powerfully realised the subtle but sacrosanct difference between a winner and a podium finisher. I strongly felt the missing glory between a gold medal and the other two medals. I emphatically understood the fine line between champions and medalists. And above all, i learnt that if your goal isn't to win, then even if you deserve to win, you will never win! So, contrary to what many people think, success is not so much about talent as it is about vision, it is not so much about gifts as it is about goals — in fact, the way i know it now, goals itself are the biggest gifts!

My goal was not to win, so i didn't, even if i deserved to. The same applies to everyone, to every competition of every scale, everywhere. The more i researched, the more i understood how true it was. So, i made it my lifelong mission to create awareness about

INTRODUCTION

the power of goals. Over the next few years, i created and fulfilled a handsome set of goals myself: i wrote, directed, produced and acted in a Bollywood movie and created dozens of Guinness World Records (at one point, i simultaneously held Guinness World Records in five sports: cricket, soccer, squash, frisbee and basketball).

In 2018, i coined a new word Goalete — joining two words Goal and Athlete — signifying an athlete of goals, and designed a program called Goalete Program to motivate Olympic athletes. In September 2019, i was appointed Team India's official motivator for the senior world wrestling championship in Nursultan, Kazakstan. In terms of Olympic qualifications, it turned out to be India's best-ever tournament in any sport. But much more importantly, i got to watch and learn from the finest wrestlers in the world — Mijian Lopez, Abdurashid Sadulaev, David Taylor, Jordan Burroughs — and got to experience first-hand the power of goals.

So, when my own 20th anniversary of goals came around, i decided to celebrate it by digging deep into the life stories of the most inspiring Olympic champions and coaches, and see if i could find a common denominator in their success. Over the next few weeks, i was indeed happy and humbled to learn that none of them were "freaks of nature" but products of design. They all had a

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common sponsoring energy: goals. And each one of them had a common goal: gold.

Their goal was to become the best, the finest, the greatest in their craft, and that is what drove all of them. None of them won the gold just like that, but they did it because it was their goal. In fact, every legend in every field has become so because it was their *goal*. It was not per chance or a "stroke of luck" that they got to where they eventually landed. Unlike the vast majority, they had not tilled the field without planting the seeds. They envisioned goals of gold and that's how things manifested in their life.

That, my friends, is my intent for you. That you too set goals of gold in your life, in your field, in your own way and go for the maximum. At the end of the day, we all deserve to be the very best version of ourselves and live the very best life that we ever can. Here's wishing you infinite happiness and success in the pursuit of that goal and every goal of gold that you ever set.

Michael Phelps

The Boy Who Was Predicted to Fail

The most successful Olympian of all time, Michael Phelps, failed to win any medal in his first Olympics. At the 2000 Sydney Olympics, 47 swimmers from the US had taken part. Out of them, 40 had won medals. Only 7 returned home empty-handed — Michael was one of them! He was distraught. His childhood teacher's words rang in his head: "Michael, you'd never amount to anything, and you'd never be successful in life!" As a child, Michael was diagnosed with ADHD, and he'd experienced focus issues all his life. Now, reeling under a massive setback, he realised that the best way to focus in life is by setting goals — the bigger the goal, the greater the focus. So, Michael set a spectacular goal: to win 5+ gold medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

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Many people told him that it was an audacious goal, that he should instead aim to win 5+ medals rather than gold medals, because it sounded “realistic”. But Michael was unmoved. He smiled and told his detractors: “From now on, my goal is to *always* win the gold. Nothing but the very best will do for me.”

He knew that his training would have to be commensurate with his goal. So he promised his coach that over the next four years, he'd never intentionally miss any training session, come what may. He even used to train on Sundays, holidays, his birthday, New Year's Eve, and “pretty much every day my competitors used to rest”. He pasted his goal on his locker and used to steadfastly focus on it every day. Thanks to his stellar dedication, he eventually won 6 gold medals and 2 bronze medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

Immediately after that goal was fulfilled, Michael set a new one. He resolved to win 8 gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics — more than the historic 7 gold medals Mark Spitz had won at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Everybody told him it was “impossible”. But he said emphatically: “Nobody is going to put a limit on my goals, except myself!” He trained for years with that specific goal in mind, and at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he became the first and the only athlete in Olympic history to win 8 gold medals at a single games.

MICHAEL PHELPS

At the 2012 London Olympics, Michael won 4 gold medals, became the most decorated Olympian in history and retired. Two years later, he made a comeback, went to Rio and won five gold medals. He said: “Winning a gold is like riding a wave. Once you’ve done it, you want to do it again and again.”

His coach Bob Bowman once said: “Michael Phelps is synonymous with goals.” Throughout his two-decade-long swimming career, Michael used to write specific goals for every practice session. He stepped out of the pool, only when he’d achieved them, however many laps it took, or however many attempts he had to make. Over the course of his career, he achieved over 15,000 training goals — and each of those goals was driven by a larger goal: to win more Olympic gold medals than any other athlete in history or “to revolutionise the sport of swimming” or “to dare kids to dream — as big as they possibly can!”

Wilma Rudolph

The Girl Who Couldn't Walk

Wilma Rudolph is the absolute proof that *nothing* is impossible. She was the 20th of 22 children born in an impoverished family. Her father was a railway porter and her mother was a maid. Growing up, her family struggled to put food on the table. At the age of five, she was struck by polio which completely paralysed her left leg. Doctors told her mother she'd never be able to walk again. Her mother was always concerned about her wellbeing and used to take her to a hospital 80 kilometres away for treatment every week. Besides, her family members used to give her massages four times a day to get blood circulating in her left leg and help her recover from her illness. For the first few years, she was completely confined to the bed, and later she started walking using a back

WILMA RUDOLPH

brace and an orthopaedic shoe. It took her seven years to regain her ability to walk.

One day, her father got some bakery wrapped in an old newspaper. On it, she read about the Helsinki Olympics that were going to be held three years later. She was intrigued and started to “dream the dream of greatness.” At the age of 11, even before she had started walking normally, she told her mother: “Within the next 10 years, i am going to become an Olympic champion — that is my goal!”

In 1956, within four years of learning to walk again, she won the bronze medal in the 4 x 100 m relay at the Montreal Olympics. While everyone congratulated her on her tremendous accomplishment, she was inconsolable. She said to herself: “I won't rest till i win the gold.” She committed herself to an intense training regimen that involved staying away from her family, friends and all possible distractions for four years. All she allowed herself was practise, practise and more practise.

Thanks to her laser-like focus, she won three gold medals at the 1960 Rome Olympics — 100 m, 200 m and 4 x 100 m relay — and set a world record in each event! She thus became the first African-American woman to win three gold medals at a single Olympics. For someone who could not even walk till she was 12, it was incredible to win the 100 m and 200 m Olympic golds within a

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short span of eight years and be hailed by track experts as the fastest woman in history!

When Wilma started running, track-and-field competitions were male-dominated events. Plus, she was an African-American athlete growing up in the heart of racial segregation. Many a time, she was denied even the most basic training facilities. But thanks to her iconic example, female athletes, including nonwhites, were allowed to compete in mainstream athletic events. After the historic Olympic victory, she said: "The potential for greatness lives inside each one of us. Anyone anywhere can do anything. All my life people kept telling me why i can't something, while i just kept focusing on how i can do it. Even when my movement was confined to the bed, my imagination was unlimited, and that is what has got me here today."

If we dig deep, we will realise it is Wilma's goal of gold that gave her an exceptional surge of energy. She set a goal that everyone considered "impossible". But she was not deterred by the improbablness of the goal. She did not dream of only qualifying for the Olympics but of becoming a champion, of winning the gold. She said to herself emphatically "my goal is gold" and after she had manifested it against all odds, she went on to inspire countless millions all over the world that "where there is a goal, there is always a way!"

Usain Bolt

The Sprinter Who Was Written Off

Usain Bolt is widely considered the greatest sprinter of all time. As a child, he was passionate about sports and wanted to be a cricketer. But his coach noticed his unusual speed on the pitch and encouraged him to take up sprinting. Bolt halfheartedly joined a track and field club, but his mind was still distracted by other sports, and he did not want to take up running as a career. He hated training and relied mostly on his natural ability to get through most races. Besides, he used to mostly eat junk food and party till the wee hours of the morning. His discipline was sorely lacking, and he used to show up for practice at irregular timings. Many coaches pointed to his lack of discipline and wrote him off, saying he'd never fulfil his potential. When he progressed to the senior level,

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he was selected in the Jamaican team for the 2004 Athens Olympics. However, in a disappointing debut, he was eliminated in the very first round of the 200 m.

He returned to Jamaica, and the enormity of the loss hit him hard. He felt he'd let down his teammates and countrymen. For the first time, he introspected his own commitment to the game and realised what an indisciplined life he'd been leading so far. He resolved to become "the greatest athlete ever to live". And, for the first time, he set a goal in his life: to win the gold medal in 200 m at the next Olympic games.

Consequently, he started making wholesale changes in his life . As the saying goes: "The teacher appears when the student is ready." Very soon, Usain was guided to a new coach, Glen Mills, who eventually became the guiding force in his life. Glen immediately spotted Usain's enormous potential and started transforming his unprofessional approach to the sport. His work ethic and athleticism improved tremendously as a result. Initially, Usain wanted to focus on 200 m but Glen encouraged him to add one more event to his repertoire: 400 m. However, Usain wanted to focus on the shorter 100 m sprint and asked his coach to help him train for that distance. Glen agreed on one condition: if Usain broke the 200 m national record, he'd help him train for the 100 m. Now that Usain had become consummate at goal-

USAIN BOLT

setting, he went ahead and broke the Jamaican national record that had stood for 36 years. Glen honoured his promise and started training Usain for the 100 m as well.

Initially, many people in the athletic community were sceptical that Usain's difficulty in smoothly starting out of the blocks, poor habits such as looking back at opponents and unusually tall height (he was 6'5" while most 100 m sprinters were 5'10") made him unfit to be a sprinter. But by now Usain was focused on his goals and surprised everyone by winning the gold medal in 100 m at his very first tournament, and within a few months, at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Usain won his first Olympic gold medal in 100 m with his shoelace untied — and went on to win the 200 m and 4 x 100 m golds as well, thus doing a three-peat.

Emboldened by the trailblazing performance, Usain created a new set of goals: to win gold medals in 100 m, 200 m and 4 x 100 m relay at the next two Olympics as well and do a triple-triple, something that had never been accomplished by any athlete in history before. It is a tribute to his intense determination that he did that as best as he individually could and also went on to become the most successful athlete of the world championships.

When he retired, he was asked the secret of his unprecedented success. He replied: "I wake up every morning to become a legend — simple as that."

Matthias Steiner

The Lifter Who Promised His Wife a Gold

Matthias Steiner's father was a 20-time IWF Master's world weightlifting champion whose only regret was that he never became the Olympic champion. Hearing his father talk so passionately about the biggest of all sporting stages introduced young Matthias to the realm of Olympic glory. He started weightlifting at the age of 13, and his father became his first coach.

A few days before his 18th birthday, Matthias felt an intense thirst, then he lost appetite, and started losing weight. He went to the doctor when his sight deteriorated. Upon examination, it was discovered that he had Type-1 diabetes. Most people told him that his playing career was finished, that the ailment would wreak havoc on his health and he'd consequently never be able to lift extraordinary amounts of weight again in his life.

MATTHIAS STEINER

But Matthias, like a true champion, was undeterred by the challenges that life had hurled at him and resolved to transcend them. In his heart of hearts, he knew that his goal was bigger than every limitation. So, he set about to train like he'd never done before.

The next year, he won the Austrian national championship and won it for four years in a row. He was selected for the 2004 Athens Olympics but health issues impeded his performance and he finished seventh. After he returned, there was a serious altercation between him and his national federation because of which he had to leave Austria unceremoniously. Authorities told him that he'd never be selected for the national squad again. His wife was German and to keep his Olympic dream alive, he had to apply for German citizenship. However, due to domicile laws, he was barred from all international competitions for three years — till just before the start of the Olympics. Nonetheless, he kept training with singular fervour.

In July 2007, exactly a year before the Olympics, his wife, Susann, tragically died in a car accident. She'd watched every match of his for years and it was her long-cherished dream to see him become the Olympic champion. On her deathbed, an emotional Matthias promised her that he would win the Olympic gold next year. Despite the heart-wrenching loss, and

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despite losing a lot of bodyweight and practise time, he kept on training like a man consumed by a higher calling in life.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Matthias failed in his first clean and jerk attempt, and he needed to lift 258 kg in his last attempt to win the gold — it was 20 kg more than he'd ever lifted in his life! He went backstage, closed his eyes and, zoning out every noise, refocused on the promise he'd given his wife. He strode back on stage purposefully and lifted a herculean 258 kg to win the gold medal. He pumped his fists and looked heavenwards, tears of joy streaming down his face. Later, during the victory ceremony, Matthias stood on the podium with a photo of his late wife, who would otherwise have accompanied him to the Olympics. He said: "My promise to my wife became my goal, and i am standing here thanks to that goal!"

Driton Kuka

The Coach Whose Heart Beat With Gold

Driton Kuka, like millions of athletes around the world, dreamt of one day winning an Olympic gold medal for his country. But his dreams were wrecked by the Balkan wars of the early 1990s. He was supposed to compete at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics but his country was banned by IOC just before the Olympics because of UN sanctions. The devastating war continued unabated and ensured that Driton's career ended prematurely. He was just 20 at that time.

But Driton never stopped dreaming. He knew that if he stayed focused, his time would come — if not as a player, then as a coach. He had meagre means so after the war ended in 1999, he opened a small judo academy at his modest home. It had the most basic equipment

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and the roof was so derelict that it'd leak whenever it rained. Because the war had wrecked the economy, so people's resources in his hometown were very limited. Though money was scarce, yet Driton knew he had one thing in abundance: goals. One day, in his notebook, he wrote down his goal: "I will help my athletes win multiple Olympic gold medals." He picked up a bunch of street kids aged 7 to 9 from around his house and starting training them from his own money, with the goal of making them Olympic champions one day.

It took him 17 years to showcase the power of his goal. Kosovo was officially admitted as a full member by the IOC in 2014, and the 2016 Rio Olympics were the first one where he and his athletes got a chance to represent their newly recognised country. While Driton never got a chance to fulfill his Olympic dream as a player, he finally got to do so as a coach.

His mentee Majlinda Kelmendi, who he'd been training for 16 years, went on to win the gold in the U-52 kg category, thus becoming the first-ever Olympic gold medallist for Kosovo. After her historic win, she said: "In Kosovo, we have nothing. But we have our coach Kuka — and he's everything!"

Not one to sit on his laurels, and remembering his original goal of winning multiple Olympic gold medals for Kosovo, he resolved to get even better results at the

DRITON KUKA

next Olympics. Despite the one-year delay, he kept his athletes focused and prepared. And true to his goal, two of his judokas won the gold medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The world was stunned by the outstanding achievement of a “small team”. Once again, his gold-winning athletes dedicated their medals to him. They said that the coach had shown them that the highest heights were within their reach and they could easily achieve what was considered “inconceivable” in Kosovo even a decade ago. For his outstanding goals and achievements, Driton was awarded the best judo coach in the world in 2021 by the International Judo Federation. While acknowledging the award, he said: “Even if the roof above your head is leaking, the goal inside your heart must always keep beating!”

Katinka Hosszu

The Girl Who Was Told to Retire

Katinka Hosszu failed to win any medal in three consecutive Olympics. At her debut Olympics in 2004, she finished in the 31st position. When she returned medal-less from the 2012 London Olympics, she received a copious amount of criticism from everyone in her native country. The president of the swimming association in Hungary brazenly suggested that she should retire. Though she was still a young girl of 23, most people sneered that she was “way past her prime”. One trainer told her to give up swimming and open a beauty salon instead! Almost everyone opined that Katinka did not have it in her to win at the biggest of stages. Even her coach at that time asked her to concentrate on non-Olympic competitions like the world championships and

KATINKA HOSSZU

European championships. But Katinka was undeterred. She knew that her truest potential would be unrealised if she did not attain the highest pinnacle of sporting glory: Olympic gold. So she went ahead and scripted an extraordinary goal: to win at least three gold medals at the 2016 Rio Olympics, one for every missed Olympics!

She started training for eight hours every day, went on an intensive weight-training regimen and started participating in swimming meets all over the world to increase her stamina and endurance. One of Katinka's goals was to participate in twice as many competitions as any other swimmer and to win a gold medal in every major international meet before the Rio Olympics. She said to herself: "No matter the competition, my goal is always gold!" Within three years, she won every major championship in the world and became the first swimmer in the history of the sport to hold world records in all five medley events at the same time. In fact, she broke 23 world records in four years before the 2016 Rio Olympics! She was nicknamed the Iron Lady by the Chinese, who were blown away by her grit in the pool. At the Rio Olympics, owing to her exemplary commitment and diligence, she won three golds and a silver — more individual medals than any other swimmer.

In all, Katinka has won 97 major international medals in swimming and most of them came after the

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2012 London Olympics — her third consecutive medal-less Olympics — and after almost everyone had asked her to retire! In 2020, she told reporters: “I always try to set such high goals that i achieve a lot of things during that journey. When i was a teenager, my goals were small: to be a decent enough swimmer so that i could get a scholarship to go study in the US! And honestly, that's why i didn't achieve much. But for the past eight years, my goals have always been to either win a gold medal or break a world record. I am still the same person i was but my goals have changed — and as anyone can see, so has my life!” Katinka Hosszu is a living example that we are only as big as our goals.

Muhammad Ali

The Kid Who Was Thrown Out

Muhammad Ali was born into a family of frugal means. His father was a billboard painter and his mother was a domestic helper. At school, Muhammad was a below-average student, who had tremendous difficulties in reading and writing. He grew up amid inhuman racial segregation. There was one occasion when he was thirsty, he went to a store to drink water and they threw him out because of his skin colour. When he was 12, he read about the brutal killing of a African-American boy who was “punished” for talking to a Caucasian woman. Seeing all that discrimination made Muhammad very angry, and he wanted to do something positive to transform the plight of the African-American community. One day, he saw a television boxing program called *Tomorrow's Champions*.

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He was ignited and felt that he'd found his true purpose in life. He made his goal that one day he'd become an Olympic champion and a world champion.

He met a policeman who became his first trainer and coached him during his amateur years. Though there was zero history of competitive sports in his family, Muhammad was very focused and determined. He openly told his trainer that he wanted to become the greatest boxer of all time and that his goal was to "win the Olympic gold while i am still a teenager". He was so focused on success that within six weeks he won his first match. Over the next six years, he won two national Golden Glove titles and won 96 percent of his bouts, mostly by knockout.

Based on his performances, he was selected for the 1960 Rome Olympics in the light heavyweight division. Despite being only 18, he was fiercely determined to achieve his goal. In the quarterfinal, he defeated the previous Olympic champion Russia's Gennady Shatkov by unanimous 5-0 verdict. And in the final, he convincingly defeated three-time European champion Zbigniew Pietrzykowski of Poland to win the gold medal. Muhammad Ali's joy was unconfined after his triumph, telling reporters about what being an Olympic champion meant:

"I didn't take that medal off for 48 hours. I even wore it to bed. I didn't sleep too good because i had to sleep on my back so that the medal wouldn't cut me. But

MUHAMMAD ALI

i didn't care, i was the Olympic champion! This was the biggest goal of my life, and the joy of achieving it was unmatched."

After the Olympics, he turned professional and went on to become one the greatest heavyweight champions in the world, winning the world heavyweight championship on three occasions. *Sports Illustrated* magazine once called him "the one who inspires those who inspire millions". Muhammad himself had zero qualms or hesitation about calling himself The Greatest. He once said this about his inner drive: "What keeps me going is goals — and my biggest goal is to be the very best, the greatest of all time!"

Nadia Comaneci

The Gymnast Who Kept Falling

As a child, Nadia Comaneci was always hyperactive and full of energy, so her mother decided to enrol her in gymnastics classes. She thought that this will make the little Nadia tired, but it actually had the opposite effect. Nadia was so enthralled with the sport that she would jump and run around any chance she got. She developed a deep love for gymnastics and committed herself to three hours of intense training every day after school.

However, when she started her playing career, things didn't go as well as she'd imagined. She fell a lot, and a few contestants even mocked her. A few months later, she competed at the Romanian national junior championships and placed 13th. Despite her low ranking, the failure only seemed to motivate her more. That day,

NADIA COMANECI

she went back home and resolved that she'd go to every competition with a clear intent and desire to win. She continued to train and her form improved drastically. Next year, when she was just eight, she won the gold medal at the Romanian national junior championships, blowing away the competition and winning in the most spectacular fashion imaginable.

In 1975, Nadia started competing in senior tournaments at the age of 14. She won five medals at the European championships, her very first tournament, and soon qualified for the upcoming Olympics. In the 80-year history of the Olympics, never had any gymnast received a perfect 10 from the judges. It was considered "impossible". Before the 1976 Montreal Olympics, the games' timekeepers, Omega, had asked the IOC if they needed a new scorecard to display a score of perfect 10, as extra space was required to show 10.00. But the IOC had flatly refused, saying a perfect score was not possible.

Enter Nadia Comaneci on 18 July 1976. Her routine on the uneven bars was simply flawless. The judges and the audience were stunned, and after much deliberation, the judges awarded her full marks. But since the scoreboard couldn't accommodate the required four digits, 1.00 was flashed on the screen. Nadia looked at the scoreboard bemused but soon the thunderous applause and standing ovation from the audience assured her that

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she had etched her name in the annals of immortality. She went to win six more perfect 10s and three gold medals at the Montreal Olympics and etched her name in history books as one of the greatest Olympic athletes of all time.

In her book *Letters to a Young Gymnast*, Nadia wrote: "I love being told something is impossible because I want to do what no one has ever done before. Being a champion is about pushing yourself beyond the possible and believing in your abilities even when everyone around you says you aren't capable."

John Smith

The Wrestler Who Lived Like a Monk

John Smith is the most titled American wrestler ever. He is the only American wrestler to ever win six consecutive Olympic or world championships. In 1987, he won the Pan-American championship and the world championship. From 1986 to 1988, he stayed undefeated and won 131 matches straight! From 1989 to 91, he won three world championships on the trot. In 1988, he became the Olympic champion in 62 kg freestyle wrestling and was awarded the best freestyle wrestler in the world. He thought he'd achieved almost everything there was to achieve and unwittingly allowed himself to get a little smug.

After the 1988 Seoul Olympics, he went to Cuba for a tournament where he got a reality check. He lost to a completely unknown Cuban wrestler. The result shook everyone in the wrestling world. Not only was John

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the world champion, he was also the Olympic champion and the finest freestyle wrestler on the planet, and he had just lost unceremoniously to a player whom everyone expected him to pin in a few seconds. It was a humiliating loss for him, and as he exited the stadium, the thought of retirement cloyed his head.

That night he dove deep into himself and realised that he had “accomplished a lot, and when that happens, you tend to get satisfied and not do the things that got you there.” An aching awareness dawned on him that he had started to take himself and his talent for granted. He cried himself to sleep that night, like a newborn.

The next morning, he woke up with a sense of renewed purpose and vowed to rededicate himself to wrestling. On the plane back home from Cuba, he wrote down on a blank sheet of paper a goal that would fire him up, a goal he'd live for: to become the first American wrestler to win two consecutive Olympic gold medals. He resolved he'd sacrifice everything it'd take to achieve his goal. He said to himself: “Anything that gets in my way, i'd eliminate. I'd completely focus on myself. I'd find a way how i can continually win, how i can beat everybody. I'll do whatever it takes to be the Olympic champion again.”

He started getting up at 3 am for his workouts, before everyone else. He happily embraced a Spartan

JOHN SMITH

lifestyle and started driving a second-hand car — he promised himself a new car only if he completed his goal. He started living in a rented studio apartment when he could afford a lavish accommodation. He stopped going to parties and dinners and cut himself from all social life. He resolved not to buy any new clothes till he achieved his goal. Essentially, he started living like a monk, away from all distractions.

The result of his razor-sharp dedication was that he won the gold at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and created history. After the Olympics, a reporter asked him his formula for success. John replied: “It’s my obsession with wrestling and winning. When i set a goal, there are no escapes and exits. I just totally lock myself in, and i do whatever it takes to win. Nothing can come in my way — not even myself!”

10

Nicolas Massu

The Guy Who Always Came Up Short

When he was 12, Nicolas Massu saw the opening ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics on television. He was completely enthralled by the grandeur of the event, and was especially fascinated by the medal ceremony. After the event was over, he curiously asked his father: “How many golds has our country won at the Olympics?” His father drew a blank. Chile had been participating for almost a century at the Olympics but had never won any gold. A silent determination grew inside Nicolas to make his country proud: “I will become an Olympic champion one day and gift my country a gold medal!”

From that point, he started creating the monument of his goal, one tournament at a time. Though he had a few successes as a junior, his career never took on the

NICOLAS MASSU

lustre that he'd have liked. He played in a lot of tournaments on the ATP circuit but kept coming up short and never quite achieved a podium finish. At the 2000 Sydney Olympics, he got his first chance to fulfil his goal but he lost in the second round of the tournament.

That loss, instead of disappointing him, reinforced his intense desire to win. He took his first Olympics as a learning curve and plunged himself into preparing for the next one in Athens. He worked for long hours on every aspect of his game and cut out every distraction from his life in the pursuit of gold. To the committed ones, life always gives a second chance and Nicolas got his in August 2004 at the Athens Olympics.

He teamed up with Fernando González to try to win the gold for Chile in the doubles event. To create history, they played one of the most iconic doubles matches on the Olympic stage. Up against the celebrated German pair of Nicolas Kiefer and Rainer Schüttler, Massú and González saved four straight match points in the fourth set tie-break to claim the fifth set and the gold in a historic fashion.

The following day, Nicolas captured his second gold medal by defeating American Mardy Fish in five sets in the men's singles final. Within 24 hours, Chile had won two gold medals where they hadn't won a single gold in over 100 years! The people in Chile were so ecstatic at

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Nicolas' victories that there were night-long parties in their capital city, Santiago.

What made the victory even more special was that Nicolas was a claycourt specialist who hadn't won a single match in two years on the hardcourt surface, on which the Olympic tennis competition was being held in Athens. Besides, he was completely depleted, coming off an intense five-set duel in the doubles event, and in less than 24 hours he had play the singles final. But Nicolas did not let any limitation hold him back, and he went on to become the only man till date to have won both singles and doubles golds at the same Olympics. Moreover, his two golds are the only ones that Chile has won at the Olympics till date.

On that historic day, with the two gold medals slung around his neck, Nicolas said: "This is the best memory in my sports career, the best legacy i can give to any 12-year-old child who dares to dream. Trust me, if i can do it, so can you!"

Fehaid Al-Deehani

The Shooter Who Was Called Too Old

At the 2016 Rio Olympics, Fehaid Al-Deehani won a gold medal in shooting, and became the first-ever independent athlete to do so. Moreover, he was 50 at that time!

At the age of 16, Fehaid's elder brother took him to the shooting range, and he was hooked. He found his passion and his goal: to become the first Kuwaiti Olympic champion. His brother told him that he'd have to work very hard for his goal. So Fehaid established an eight-hour-a-day training routine and committed himself fully to his goal. But as the saying goes: "Big goals require big patience." It took 18 years before he could get a taste of the fabled Olympic glory. At the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Fehaid won bronze in double trap, and became the first-ever Olympic medallist for his country. At the 2012 London Olympics, he won another bronze in single trap and became the first multiple Olympic

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medallist for his country. But his goal was to win a gold medal. So, he kept going despite seemingly insurmountable challenges. Most people told him that he was too old to keep playing and that an Olympic gold was “too difficult for a Kuwaiti athlete to win”. In an interview, Fehaid once said: “People wanted me to win but never thought i actually could!”

In October 2015, the IOC banned Kuwait due to domestic laws that permit government interference in sports. Fehaid was offered to play under the IOC flag as an independent athlete. There were a total of eight independent athletes across all disciplines at the 2016 Games, and nobody considered them much of a competition. Fehaid thought: “Even if i can’t do it for my country’s flag, i can still do it for my country. I’d take the gold with me to Kuwait anyway!” On 10 August 2016, against all odds, battling difficult weather conditions and against a stiff competition, Fehaid won the gold medal and fulfilled a goal that took 34 years to manifest! By fulfilling his goal, he became the first-ever Olympic gold medallist from Kuwait. Besides, 60 percent of his country’s Olympic medals have been won by him. Fehaid is also the inspiration behind the success of skeet shooter Abdullah Al-Rashidi, who is Kuwait’s only other Olympic medallist.

After winning the Olympic gold, Fehaid said: “Nothing is impossible. You can achieve your dream if you make it your goal and set a series of smaller goals to

FEHAID AL-DEEHANI

get there. You really have to make the commitment. Don't look for support in other people. It's in you — raise your personal support from within." Fehaid is a living example that age is just a number, even at the Olympics!

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Glen Mills

The Failure Who Became the Finest Coach

Almost everyone has heard of Usain Bolt but very few have heard of the man who helped shape his Olympic success: Glen Mills, his coach. Most people think that only highly accomplished players can become highly accomplished coaches but Glen Mills' example proves otherwise. Born in 1949 in Jamaica, Glen joined the sprinting team of his school at the age of 13. However, he used to be among the last-finishers in almost every race. A few months later, he dropped out of the team, realising that he did not have it in him to become a professional sprinter. He was crushed but his natural enthusiasm for sprinting was undiminished. He loved watching other athletes run, and soon he volunteered to assist his sprinting team coach in practice sessions. From his experience as an assistant coach, he learnt that athletes

GLEN MILLS

who were performing exceptionally well had clear training goals while those whose performances were subpar had undefined goals. That acted like an epiphany for Glen as he powerfully realised the importance of goals. One day, at his school sprinting meet, he defined his goal in life: “If i couldn’t become a sprinter, that’s fine. I will help my country Jamaica win multiple Olympic gold medals in athletics as a coach. That’s my goal.”

In the sixties and seventies, Jamaica was not the dominant force in sprinting that it later came to be known as. They had only a handful of Olympic medals till then, out of which only two were gold. Seen in that context, Glen’s goal can only be considered extraordinary. Come to think of it, he had zero accomplishments as an athlete — he’d barely run a handful of races in his life — and he had zero professional training as a coach. Yet he set a goal that’d seem “impossible” to most people.

He started upgrading his skills as a coach and undertook advanced courses from IOC and IAAF. Meanwhile, he never gave up pursuit of his goal and kept believing that he’d help Jamaican athletes win gold medals at the Olympics and world championships. In 2004, more than 40 years after he’d started his coaching career, he was approached by a young athlete called Usain Bolt who was promising but his performances on track were somewhat lacklustre. Glen’s coaching helped Usain

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become more focused, develop more efficient stride frequency and attain better balancing. As a result, he became the most successful sprinter in history who won 8 Olympic gold medals and 11 world championship gold medals. Bolt later said: "It was Glen's coaching which made me improve, not only as an athlete, but also as a person."

In late 2009, Mills retired as the Jamaican national athletics coach, having overseen his athletes to 33 Olympic medals and 71 world championship medals. He said: "All that i have done in my life has originated from my goals. So i encourage all my athletes and everyone else to set goals, even if they seem out of reach. If you focus long enough, there's nothing you can't achieve!"

Lin Dan

The Kid Who Declared He Will Be the Best

Lin Dan is widely considered the greatest badminton player of all time. When he was small, his parents wanted him to become a pianist. But Lin's heart was set on badminton. He promised them that "one day i will become the best badminton player in the world and make you very proud." In a way, that prophecy is what he tried to manifest throughout his life.

In 2002, at the age of 18, he won his first major international tournament, the Korea Open, and became world number one within two years of turning pro. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, where he was the number one seed, he lost in the first round in straight games. He went back and shut himself off from the world. A few weeks later, he emerged from his disappointment and

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made a goal sheet on which he wrote: "My goal is to win the Olympic gold in 2008 in Beijing in front of my countrymen."

He pursued that goal relentlessly over the next four years and won 21 major tournaments, including back-to-back world championships. Lin's training style was legendary. When a competitor of Lin's saw him training in a hotel gym on the morning of their match at a tournament, his first instinct was to think the match was off. "On the day of the match, you don't really push yourself so that you are fresh for your match. Lin Dan was really going hard in the gym. He was groaning and yelling. With that kind of effort there was no way he would be able to play his match. He was working with more intensity on the day of a match than I did in a regular training session. It didn't make sense to me. Then in the evening, we played our match, and he beat me in straight games. And I wondered what this guy is made of!"

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he won the gold medal in dominating fashion and became the first-ever men's number one seed to win an Olympic gold medal in badminton. He promptly created a new goal: to become the first-ever men's singles player to win consecutive Olympic gold medals in badminton. The burnout rate in badminton is very high and none of the renowned players

LIN DAN

had ever lasted more than one Olympic cycle at the very top. But Lin's goal was to do what nobody had ever done before, and, as he'd promised his parents, "to become the greatest of all time in badminton".

His intensity continued unabated. Over the next four years, he again won 18 major tournaments and two more world championships. In 2011, Lin became the first-ever badminton player to complete the "Super Grand Slam", which involves winning all nine of the world's biggest badminton tournaments. The next year, at the 2012 London Olympics, Lin went on to create badminton history by winning his second gold medal, despite losing the first set and being on the verge of losing many a time in the decider set.

Over the course of his career, Lin won 66 major international titles, including two Olympic golds, five world championships and six All-England titles. When asked later about his iconic success, Lin said: "At every tournament, my goal was just to win the gold, and i always tried to achieve my goal, no matter what!"

Kipchoge Keino

The Man Who Inspired Kenya to Run

Kipchoge Keino's parents died when he was very small, and he was raised by his aunt, whose family was so poor that they could not give him lunch money. He used to run barefoot 6 km to school, run back 6 km to have lunch, run again 6 km to attend school and then run back 6 km after school. Throughout his school years, he used to run 24 km to his school and back. He continued running long distance and took a vow to win an Olympic gold for Kenya one day. "I will win the Olympic gold for my parents and my people."

When he went to participate in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, he suddenly developed gallstones and it hurt him even when he walked. Driven to win a gold for Kenya, he participated in the 10,000 m event and collapsed

KIPCHOGE KEINO

during the race. He still got up and completed it somehow. Two days later, reeling under excruciating pain, he participated in the 5,000m race and won the silver, missing the gold by a fraction of a second. After the race, doctors who examined him told him that he'd die if he ran again. Even his team management told him to rest and instructed the support staff to not wake him up for his last race, the 1,500 m, which was scheduled to happen the next day. However, on his own, Kipchoge, woke up one hour before the race. He remembered the vow he had taken, immediately packed his kit and rushed to the stadium.

On the way to the stadium, his bus got stuck in traffic. Realising that he'd be late if he stayed on board, he hauled the kit on his back, jumped off the bus and ran 3 km to the stadium. On reaching the venue, he quickly changed and charged to the track with less than five minutes to go for the race to start. When the buzzer sounded, he ran like a gazelle, and despite the pain, exertion and an ever-looming risk to his life, Kipchoge zoned out everything else and just focused on his dream. 3:34.9 minutes later, he crossed the line and became the new 1,500 m Olympic champion. He won that race by 20 metres, or 3 seconds — the longest victory margin in the history of that event. And even more remarkably, the man who came second was Jim Ryun, a world champion who had been undefeated in the 1,500 m in three years!

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After the race, Kipchoge went back to Kenya and opened an orphanage and a school to give back to society. He is the man who pioneered the running craze in Kenya and inspired millions all over the world to pick up the sport. And even more importantly, he made a positive impact by giving back and lifting many out of deprivation and hunger. He later said, "I'd have given up that day in Mexico City but my goal did not let me give up!" In 2016, Kipchoge was given the first-ever Olympic Laurel award for his outstanding contribution to the Olympic movement.

Penny Oleksiak

The Girl Who Was Told She Was Too Weak

Penny Oleksiak is the first athlete born in the 21st century to win an Olympic gold medal. She started swimming at the age of 9, which is pretty late by Olympic standards. She was rejected by three coaches, because she had difficulty even swimming the length of the pool. They said she was “too weak to swim”. One of her teachers told her to stop swimming and focus on studies because “swimming won’t get you anywhere”. Finally she was accepted by a coach who believed in her and assured her that she’d be an Olympian one day. She went on a strict training regimen.

Six weeks before her first big competition, Penny fractured her elbow in a cycling accident. She still won six medals there. People started saying that she’d compete at

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the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which was five years away, and win a medal there. But her coach made her believe that she was good enough to compete at the 2016 Rio Olympics. Penny went one step ahead and created a spectacular goal for herself: to win a gold medal at the 2016 Olympics!

When she went there — her first-ever senior international event — she was ranked 49th in the world. Nobody thought she had a chance, but to everyone's surprise, she won the gold medal in 100 m freestyle, becoming the youngest Canadian ever to win a gold medal. At the 50 m mark, she was in seventh place and there was a massive one-second gap between her and the leader. But she kept her focus on her goal, closed the gap spectacularly and went on to win the gold in a historic tie with Simone Manuel, breaking the Olympic record in the process.

Penny became the first Canadian woman to win an Olympic medal of any colour in the 100 m freestyle event. She was in tenth grade at that time! Imagine, she'd just picked up the sport seven years ago, and people said that she'd "picked it up too late". She went on to win four medals at the Olympics and became the first from her country to win those many medals at a single summer Olympics. Besides, she set an Olympic record and five Canadian records at those games. At the 2020 Tokyo

PENNY OLEKSIK

Olympics, despite debilitating pain in her back, she won three more medals and became Canada's most-decorated Olympian. Also, in 2022, she went on to win her ninth medal at the world championships and became Canada's most-decorated swimmer at those championships too.

She later said: "Deep down, i'm a lazy person. But i know that great things never come from comfort zones. That's why goals are so important. My goal was to become one of Canada's greatest Olympians, and if it were not for that goal, i'd just be another kid swimming in the neighbour's pool!"

When she was asked in an interview if she feels satisfied with her accomplishments, she said: "Every day, my goals keep getting bigger. Every time i swim, i want to swim faster. I certainly want to win more Olympic gold medals and create world records. The way i look at it, i've just begun!"

Dave Brailsford

The “1 Percent Improvement” Coach

Dave Brailsford is one of the most successful coaches in Olympic history across all sporting disciplines. When British Cycling hired Dave as its new performance director in 2003, British riders had won just a single gold medal at the Olympic Games in almost 100 years. The British cycling team had such a pedestrian reputation that a top bike manufacturer in Europe had refused to sell bikes to them because they were afraid that their bikes would be considered substandard if other professionals saw the British using them! Dave resolved to take the team out of mediocrity and to make Britain the most dominant force in the world in cycling. He knew that the way to do that would be to create a goal of winning as many Olympic and world championship gold medals as possible in cycling — and that’s exactly what he did.

DAVE BRAILSFORD

He rooted his training in the philosophy of marginal gains, which was about searching for a tiny margin of improvement in everything one does. Dave said: "The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improve it by 1 percent, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together." Dave and his team undertook a rigorous mission of ushering in 1 percent improvement in every conceivable area, whether directly linked to cycling (creating better seat design, testing fabrics in a wind tunnel, getting the cyclists to wear electrically heated overshots) or completely unrelated to cycling (getting a surgeon to show the cyclists the best way to wash their hands, testing which massage gel led to the best muscle recovery and painting the inside of their team truck white to spot tiniest particles of dust on their equipment).

The results of Dave's relentless pursuit of excellence were swift and enormous. He played a pivotal role in developing the British cycling team into one of the most respected and successful Olympic teams in history. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Britain won two gold medals and four overall medals; at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Britain won eight gold medals and topped the cycling medal table; and at the 2012 London Olympics, Britain won eight gold medals, twelve overall medals and

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created nine Olympic records and seven world records! During his stint with the team, British cyclists won a total of 18 Olympic gold medals and 59 World championship gold medals. Besides, Dave also spearheaded Britain's first-ever professional cycling team called Team Sky which won the world's most prestigious cycling race, the Tour de France, seven out of eight times between 2012 and 2019.

When someone asked Dave about his phenomenal accomplishments, he smiled and said: "If you choose to be 1 percent better every day, there's nothing you can't achieve really!"

Emil Zatopek

The Runner Who Wore a Bag of Sand

Emil Zatopek was the seventh child of his parents, born into a poor family in erstwhile Czechoslovakia. At the age of 16, he started working at a shoe factory, where he ran a race for the first time in his life as part of his factory's sports team. To everyone's surprise, he came second out of 100 contestants. While everyone congratulated him, he sullenly retreated to a corner. Plodded for the reason, he said: "When i started running, i realised i wanted to win the race!" From that day, he became singularly focused on winning, creating records and bagging gold medals.

Within four years, Emil broke the Czech records for 2,000, 3,000 and 5,000 metres. Not to be content with "small" achievements, he trained his eyes on world records

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and became the first person to break the 29-minute barrier for the 10,000 m run and the 60-minute barrier for the 20,000 m run.

To train for endurance and increase his capacity to withstand pain, he used to run uphill, wearing a bag full of sand in heavy army boots for hours every day. Over 11 years, he never missed a training session. He used to train whether it was rain, dark, snow, storm, anything. There were times when guests were over at his house, but he'd excuse himself and run outside for a training session. He firmly believed in the motto: the harder you train, the luckier you get. He used to say: "If you do something difficult once, you feel pain. If you do it a thousand times, you feel nothing." He was also the one who popularised the concept of interval training.

At the 1948 London Olympics, Emil won the gold medal in 10,000 m and came second in 5,000 m. However, as he did not like second-place finishes, he made it his goal to come back at the next Olympics and win gold medals in both the 5,000 m and 10,000 m events. He trained even harder than before, with his eyes firmly fixated on multiple golds. Eventually, at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, he won the 5,000 m and 10,000 m races. After the races were over, at the last minute, he decided to also run the marathon. He'd never participated in the marathon

EMIL ZATOPEK

before that! Everybody thought it was a joke. Even his team coach laughed at the prospect. But Emil went ahead, competed and won the first marathon he ever ran — that too at the Olympics! He thus became the first and the only person till date to win the 5,000 m, 10,000 m and marathon at the same Olympics. Asked later how he did it, he said, “When you have big goals, big things happen.” In February 2013, *Runners World* magazine selected him as the greatest runner of all time.

Katie Ledecky

The Girl Who Was Considered Just Average

When she was in her early teens, Katie Ledecky was an athlete who everyone considered good but nobody expected to be the best. Elite athletes in the US are subjected to a comprehensive health profile at the US Olympic Centre, and after profiling Katie, they called her “remarkably unremarkable”. They said she was “just about average” in every sense. But nobody knew that underneath the quiet demeanour was lurking a strong goal: to win more individual Olympic and world championship gold medals than any other female swimmer in the world.

At the age of 15, Katie participated in her first national competition: the US Olympic trials. She had never swum at that level before. Five weeks later, she went ahead and won the 800 m gold at the Olympics — her first-ever

KATIE LEDECKY

international competition — by seven seconds. Till then, nobody had heard of her ever. Imagine a rookie winning an Olympic swimming event in her first-ever international competition! She was 15 at that time and was the youngest American participant at the 2012 London Olympics. Her victory margin was one of the biggest in the history of swimming. Ironically, her Olympic gold medal was also the very first international medal of her career.

Two years later, she saw an even loftier vision and set three specific goals for the 2016 Rio Olympics: to win the 200 m freestyle, to go 3:56 or better in the 400 m freestyle and to go 8:05 or better in the 800 m freestyle. Back then, those times were 10 seconds faster than what anyone else had ever done and seven seconds faster than what Katie had ever done. She met them right on the nose and won four gold medals at the Rio Olympics.

At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, she won two more gold medals, while also becoming the oldest swimmer ever to win the 800 m freestyle event. Her six individual Olympic gold medals are the maximum won by any American female athlete. Besides, she has won 14 individual golds in world championships and has broken 16 world records. She has been awarded the female World Swimmer of the Year a record-breaking five times.

Imagine, all of this when she was declared “average in every sense” by a thorough scientific evaluation of her

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abilities! Goes to show that it is only we who decide how much we will accomplish in life. Katie's success is attributable to her exceptionally strong work ethic. She'd wake up every morning at 4 am for practice and would never miss any practice session. She always believed that to be better than everybody else she should train more than anybody else.

She once said: "I've always had a knack for goal-setting. I don't really compare myself to others. For me, it's about being able to set scary goals — goals that most people never even dream of — and then going out and chasing them!"

Abhinav Bindra

The Shooter Who Trained in a Banquet Hall

Abhinav Bindra made his Olympic debut in Sydney at the age of 17. Though he didn't win any medal yet the experience shaped his goal-setting. Watching many of his competitors step onto the podium infused an obsessive desire in him to become an Olympic champion. And from that point, every step of his was devoted to the fulfilment of that goal. He learnt that when it comes to Olympic gold, one can't leave anything to chance. So he set about fixing everything related to his training.

The nearest shooting range was 250 km from his home in Chandigarh. So his supportive family built a shooting range in the backyard of the house. Abhinav also realised that participating in a few competitions here and there would not make him the Olympic champion

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that he had a goal of becoming. So he started playing extensively in the European circuit, and his mother would accompany him wherever he went. At that time, shooting was still in its nascence, and there was almost zero governmental support. But he persisted solitarily, realising that “every star has to create its own light”.

At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Abhinav took a step closer to his Olympic dream by entering the finals. En route, he broke the world record in 10 m air rifle in the qualification round. What’s most remarkable about that feat is that in the 21st century, 175 world records in different sports have been broken at the Olympics, but Abhinav’s is the only one that has been broken by an Indian! Still, he finished seventh in the final and was so devastated that he contemplated giving up shooting altogether. But his unfinished goal did not let him stop and soon he recommitted himself to another Olympic cycle. This time, he became even more meticulous about his preparation.

He got to know that the shooting hall at the 2008 Beijing Olympics would be massive. Till then, he’d been practising at relatively smaller halls, so to simulate the feel, he hired a banquet hall for training. At the previous Olympics, he had already missed out on a medal despite breaking a world record in the qualifying stages because

ABHINAV BINDRA

of a shaky floor that had upset his rhythm. So he glued rubber from Ferrari tyres on his shoes as research had shown that it had the highest anti-skid properties. He later said, "I desperately wanted to win the gold and was ready to do anything in my power to ensure that."

As they say, luck favours the prepared. Riding on the back of his superlative preparation, Abhinav won the gold medal at the 2006 world championships in Zagreb and two years later at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, in a climax befitting of an edge-of the-seat thriller. After nine shots apiece, Abhinav Bindra and Finland's Henri Häkkinen were tied on 698.7 points. Abhinav shot a stunning 10.8, while Häkkinen fumbled under pressure and shot 9.7. With a total of 700.5 points, Abhinav Bindra won the final and gave India its first-ever individual Olympic gold medal. Besides, he is the first and the only Indian to have won a gold medal at the Olympics and world championships.

When plodded by someone to share his mantra for accomplishment, he once said: "The beauty of having goals in life is that they drive you, and when that is lost, you lose a lot of meaning in life. So have goals and chase them with all your being. Because you never know what they will make you one day!"

Kerri Strug

The Gymnast Who Won Gold on a Broken Leg

Kerri Strug started gymnastics at the tender age of three. At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Kerri, aged 14, was the youngest Olympian in the US team, having qualified just a month before the Games. She'd been inspired by Nadia Comaneci's feat at the 1976 Montreal Olympics and had set a goal of winning a gold medal at her debut Olympics. However, that year, despite a stellar show on the mat, she could only win a bronze medal. Like all champions, she considered bronze to be a huge personal failure and was shattered. But like all true champions, she did deep introspection and had an epiphany. Her inner voice told her: "Those who work the hardest reap the best rewards." She joined the academy of the same Romanian coach who had trained Nadia Comaneci and committed herself

KERRI STRUG

to a 10-hour-a-day, 6-days-a-week training regimen. Buoyed by a strong sense of purpose, she resumed her training, determined to win the gold medal the next time around, come what may.

There were a lot of challenges en route. Kerri had an injury that sidelined her for almost a year just before the Olympics. But thanks to her extraordinary grit, she qualified for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics as part of a formidable line-up, popularly called the Magnificent Seven. But even though this was a home Olympics and the US were in brilliant form, their gymnasts had an unenviable track record. They had never won the all-around team gold, neither at the world championships nor at the Olympics. The strong favourites were once again the Soviet team, who had claimed the gold on nine separate occasions. Despite their best efforts, the US lead had evaporated by the time it came to their final gymnast, Kerri Strug. All eyes were on her. But the thing was that Kerri had sprained her ankle during her first vault. Even the team doctors had advised her that she'd risk grave physical injury if she took further part in the competition.

As things stood, the US hope for the gold relied on Kerri's final vault. Braving excruciating pain, she limped towards the runway for her second attempt. As she plunged herself through the air, all eyes were on the

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landing. The audience arose to give her a standing ovation as she managed a near perfect landing on both feet. She raised her arms in triumph as she realised the enormity of what she'd done. Thanks to her stellar effort, US had won the team gold in gymnastics for the first time ever! Kerri collapsed on the mat and needed urgent medical assistance. The team coach, Bela Karolyi, had to carry her onto the victory podium and after the ceremony, she was hospitalised for third-degree tendon damage.

Kerri left the Olympics a hero, becoming a regular on TV chat shows and was invited for a visit to the White House by the president of the United States. As she later said: "Even though my ankle gave way, my goal of the gold medal never left me, and that's what made me land perfectly on my feet that day!"

Billy Mills

The Guy Who Was Removed From the Photo

Billy Mills was a Native American, born into grinding poverty. His mother died when he was 7 and his father when he was 12. He lived with his uncle's family in one of the poorest areas in the US. In order to cope with his emotional pain, he started running at the age of 13. In college, he was often subjected to racial discrimination. One time, he had lined up for a group photo after a race when the photographer abrasively pointed a finger at him and said: "You dark-skinned guy, I want you out of the photo because you're spoiling it!" Billy felt so humiliated that he went back to his room and thought of ending his life. But, providentially, his deceased father's words resonated in his ears: "Billy, it takes a dream to heal a broken soul." He wiped his tears and wrote down his dream: 10,000 m Olympic gold.

GOAL IS GOLD

Though Billy tried hard, he did not qualify for his first Olympics. On his next try, when he successfully qualified for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, his national Olympic committee flatly refused to provide him shoes for the race. They told him: "We have shoes only for those we expect to do well." He borrowed shoes from a friend and went for the race. In fact, he was so poor that Billy never owned a pair of new shoes until the Olympics! When he entered the competition, he was a complete underdog. He was 26 and had never won any international competition in his life. Most of the participants and officials hadn't even heard his name. In fact, at the US Olympic trials too, he'd failed to win the race.

He went ahead and, despite all odds, he eventually went on to become the first and the only American till date to win the 10,000 m race at the Olympics. *Time* magazine hailed his victory as the "biggest sporting success of the year". His Tokyo victory is considered one of the greatest Olympic upsets because he was a virtual unknown going into the event. He also became the first non-European to win the Olympic gold in the 10,000 m event.

Just imagine: Americans have won gold medal in almost every Olympic discipline but till date, over 125 years, only one American has ever won the 10,000 m Olympic gold: Billy Mills. And he won it as much for his talent as he did for his goal.

BILLY MILLS

He later said: "Winning the Olympic gold became a goal that i lived and breathed every moment of my life for over 10 years. As life has taught me, if you nurture your goal with faith, then one day it will be fulfilled, however difficult it seems."

Steve Redgrave

The Dumbo Who Became the Greatest

Steve Redgrave is often considered the greatest British Olympian of all time. He is the first-ever rower to win five gold medals at five consecutive Olympic games. In fact, he is the only male athlete in history to win a gold medal in five consecutive Olympics.

However, Steve's rise to the top was chequered, and for much of his career, he suffered debilitating conditions: as a child, he had dyslexia which posed him severe reading and writing challenges, and he failed in 11th grade. Despite being British, he had to do extra English classes, which made him the subject of mockery at school. One time, he was called a dumbo by his teacher because he failed to pay attention in class.

At the age of 30, Steve was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, and at 35, when he was still at the

STEVE REDGRAVE

peak of his career, he was diagnosed with Type-2 diabetes. At that time, there were hardly any competitive sportspeople in the world who had the same medical condition. Most people painted a grim picture to him that diabetics can't be successful as competitive sportspeople, and even Steve thought it would mean the end of his rowing career. His doctor gave him the hope that he could still compete at the Olympics though even he wasn't convinced Steve could win a medal at the Olympics. Once he got the green light to compete, the goal-setter in Steve took over. He'd had an extraordinary appetite to win for 16 years. He said to himself: "Whichever race I've competed in, I've always wanted to win the gold, so I don't see any reason why it should change now!" So, true to form, he set a goal to win another Olympic gold, his fifth — a feat that had never been accomplished by any rower in Olympic history before. He looked forward four years to the gold medal race at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and started working backwards from there.

Steve's diabetic condition was so severe that he had to inject himself with insulin up to six times a day just to survive. Because his sport was physically very demanding, and required him to eat upwards of 7,000 calories per day, he had to be extremely careful about what to eat, how much to eat and when to eat. There

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were many setbacks: in 1998, his appendix had to be surgically removed and a freak road accident made him miss many months of crucial training before the Olympics. There were many times when people told him to give up, when he was frustrated, but his goal of gold kept him on course. Phenomenally, “at the grand old age of 38”, he went on to win the gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, defying all odds.

On his historic accomplishment, he later said: “I didn’t do it — my goal did! I have the greatest admiration for people who have goals, who can drive themselves to get to the highest level they can possibly go, because honestly, where’s the limit!”

Alice Coachman

The Jumper Who Won Barefoot

Alice Coachman was born the fifth of ten children in a very poor family. Her father was a plasterer, and the whole family had to work very hard to just make ends meet. Each of the children was expected to share the workload and pitch in as best as they could. Alice's daily routine included supplementing the family income by picking cotton, supplying corn to local mills or picking plums and pecans to sell. Since there weren't any other forms of entertainment, she kept herself amused by running in the streets and fancied becoming an athlete one day.

Alice grew up in the 1930s, in the heart of racial segregation in the south of US. She was unable to access athletic training facilities or participate in organised sports because of the colour of her skin. Added to the list of

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training barriers was her status as a female athlete during a time of widespread opposition to women in sports. Many thought women should not compete in sports at all. Even Alice's father strongly discouraged her from playing sports. He often reprimanded her for pursuing athletics, preferring that she stay indoors and look "dainty". However, neither societal conventions nor her father's discouragement stopped Alice. Not only did she run, but she also played softball and baseball with the boys. By seventh grade, she was one of the best athletes in her hometown. Yet that did not give her equal access to training facilities. Nonetheless, spurred by lofty aspirations, Alice trained on her own. She ran barefoot on dusty roads to improve her stamina and used sticks and rope to practise the high jump. While training, she had only one goal: "We African-Americans deserve to live with dignity, and i will become the Olympic champion to show that we are not less than anyone else."

High jump soon became her specialty, and from 1939 to 1948 she won the American national title annually. In all, Alice won 25 national titles, most of them barefoot! But in her mind, every tournament was just a build-up to the Olympics, and all she dreamt about day and night was the Olympic gold. However, as history attests, big goals are tested big time in life. The Olympics were cancelled in 1940 and 1944 due to World War II. In 1948,

ALICE COACHMAN

the Olympics were back on, and Alice qualified by creating a new US high jump record. Finally, on a rainy afternoon at the Wembley Stadium in London in August 1948, Alice cleared the 5 feet 6 1/8-inch bar on her first attempt and created a new Olympic record.

In doing so, she became not only the first African-American woman to ever win an Olympic gold, but also the only American woman to win a gold medal at the 1948 Olympic Games. The day was promptly declared "Alice Coachman Day" in her home state Georgia to celebrate her iconic accomplishment. While acknowledging the adulation, she said: "I've always believed that i could do whatever i set my mind to do. The same applies to everyone else!"

At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Alice was named by IOC as one of the greatest-ever Olympians, and she continues to be an inspiration to countless millions all over the world.

Ahmed Hafnaoui

The Kid Who Won Gold Four Years Earlier

It is said that one can spot a prodigy in a cradle. If that yardstick were used, Ahmed Hafnaoui had always been a bit of an underperformer. At the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Ahmed could only manage eighth place in the 400 m freestyle and 10th place at the 2019 world junior championships. After he started swimming at the age of 6, he had participated in 14 major tournaments internationally but had won only a bronze medal once.

Just qualifying for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was supposed to be a big deal for him. But Ahmed knew that he was born to win the Olympic gold. After all, *that* was his goal. That's why he bravely took a year off from high school to prepare for the Olympics. "It was a difficult decision. I bet on myself and it paid off."

AHMED HAFNAOUI

Ahmed barely qualified for the finals of the 400 m freestyle, with the slowest time of any of the eight finalists. So not much was expected of the 18-year-old as he entered the pool in what's normally the obscure lane 8. Minutes later, Ahmed made sure the world's eyes were entirely on lane 8 after he stunningly out-touched every other swimmer to win the gold medal. Ahmed screamed and pumped his fists in jubilation as cameras circled around him. He'd won the extremely tight race, beating Australia's Jack McLoughlin by just 0.16 seconds. Nobody expected him to win, but in his heart of hearts, Ahmed knew it was his goal to win that had actually won. Reflecting on his race, he said: "It's very difficult to win from lane 8, as you cannot really see the leaders of the race in the lanes further down. But after the opening 200 m, i was able to see some things that gave me the belief that i could win the gold, and i battled so hard in the last 50 m. Actually, from the very moment i hit the water that day, i was thinking about the gold, and nothing else."

Ahmed was a complete unknown even as an Olympic finalist. When his competitors were asked what they knew about him, they said: "Absolutely nothing!" Even Ahmed was surprised when he won the gold in Tokyo. He said: "To be honest, i expected to win gold at the 2024 Paris Olympics. But I guess the intensity of my goal was such that it happened four years earlier!"

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Ahmed's success lifted the mood of an entire nation going through the pandemic. It was the only gold won by Tunisia during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and it coincided with the country's Republic Day. "I am happy that my gold gave people some hope that they have an Olympic champion. It shows we still have champions, and we are always able to do better and better." His win was widely considered among the Top 5 moments of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, was widely considered the biggest shock of that quadrennial and even led Michael Phelps to term his performance as "unbelievable".

Asked what he considers to be his strongest characteristic as an athlete, Ahmed once said: "I'm very ambitious, and i want to win gold all the time."

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Ben Ryan

The Coach Who Often Fed His Team

In 2013, Ben Ryan was the England rugby sevens coach. He had been in charge of the national squad for seven years when he was unceremoniously fired one day. He was utterly disappointed and began to doubt his future in the game. Suddenly, he received an offer from Fiji to take over its rugby program. Fiji had always been immensely talented in rugby but they lacked consistency to be world leaders in the game. Besides, they'd never won an Olympic medal in any sport. Before Ryan left for Fiji, he set a goal: "I'm going to help Fiji win a gold medal at the next Olympics!"

When he reached Fiji, his task was not as smooth as he'd imagined. He discovered an unfit team with a poor diet, drinking problems and serious discipline issues.

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He immediately and firmly laid down the rules and threatened not to select players who refused to follow them. He introduced his team to lean meats and salads, worked hard on their fitness, banned mobile phones (including his own) before and during tournaments, and cut down on their drinking. Within a few months, the Fijian team won the prestigious Dubai sevens tournament, and the players and the administration were convinced Ben knew what he was doing.

But Ben's journey to the Olympic gold was fraught with much more than disciplinary issues. The Fijian rugby association was almost on the verge of bankruptcy and had zero money to pay him. For the first four months, he wasn't paid any salary. Nonetheless, Ben kept a steadfast focus on his goal. There were many an occasion when his team had to go for a match and there was zero money to pay for the transportation of his athletes. He dipped into his own pocket and often even bought food for the team. Come to think of it, he was a foreign coach, who had just moved to that country, without any emotional binding to his new team. He could have very easily walked out, citing lack of support from the national association. But he did not. He firmly believed in the motto: a great coach never throws in the towel, even if their athlete does.

It was largely thanks to Ben's exemplary commitment to his goal that Fiji trumped England 43-7

BEN RYAN

in an iconic performance and went on to win the gold medal at the inaugural rugby sevens event at the 2016 Rio Olympics. A national holiday was declared for the historic win, and the Fijian prime minister exclaimed: “Ben has brought untold joy to our nation, and for that we will be forever indebted to him.” Through his iconic example, Ben demonstrated that as long as the goal is gold — whether a player’s or a coach’s — everything is possible, however “impossible” it seems.

Speaking of his momentous Olympic journey, Ben said: “If you have the drive to succeed and the commitment to work hard, you can achieve any goal in life.”

Mo Farah

The Boy Who Started School at 11

Mo Farah (also known as Hussein Abdi Kahin) was born into a poor family in Somaliland. His father died in the civil war when he was aged four, and he became separated from his mother. At the age of nine, he was illegally trafficked to the UK and was forced to work as a domestic servant. He was flown from the country by a woman he had never met, and made to look after another family's children. For the first few years he was in Britain, he was not allowed to go to school, but when he was 11, he began to attend school as a refugee.

Mo wanted to become a football player but his athletic talent was spotted by his physical education teacher who encouraged him to start participating in cross-country and long-distance races. At that point, Mo's only

MO FARAH

ambition was to become a car mechanic. He was very fidgety and, as a result, his performances suffered. He'd win a few races here and there but finish lackadaisically in most of his races. Worse, he did not seem concerned at all by his inconsistent performances. One day, his PE teacher, Alan Watkinson, taking strong note of his erratic behaviour, sat him down and reminded him of the suffering multitudes he'd left behind in his homeland who desperately needed an icon, a hope to inspire them. His teacher's words had a profound impact on Mo's life, and he resolved to turn his life 180 degrees. He started setting goals for himself, something he'd never done before — "goals that seem difficult, almost impossible."

Mo knew that the ultimate pinnacle of achievement for every athlete is Olympic gold. So, he set the goal of winning the Olympic gold in 5,000 m. Soon, Mo moved into a rented apartment with an elite group of Kenyan runners. He watched them from close quarters, and he later recounted in his autobiography *Twin Ambitions*: "Running with the Kenyans opened my eyes. They sleep, eat, train and rest, that's all they do. If I ever wanted to be as good as these athletes, I had to work harder than them. That experience made me realise that I didn't just want to be British number one — I wanted to be the best in the world."

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, his debut, Mo failed to make the Olympic 5,000 m final, and it was one of the

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biggest disappointments of his life. However, he buckled down, trained harder and smarter than ever and did everything in his conscious control to become the world's number one long-distance track runner, and to do what a British runner had never done before: win Olympic golds in both 5,000 m and 10,000 m.

At the 2012 London Olympics, Mo did that in style in front of his home crowd, which was so noisy that the whole stadium shook in euphoria. But like a true champion, Mo wanted to stretch himself even further. So, he set a new goal of double-double: to win gold medals in the 5,000 m and 10,000 m to double his success at the 2016 Rio Olympics. Despite falling during the 10th lap of the 10,000 m race, Mo spectacularly got up and won the race and a week later won the 5,000 m race as well to do something what only one runner in the history of the modern Olympics had done before. In 2018, Mo switched to marathon running and won the Chicago Marathon, while setting a new European record.

Talking of his extraordinary string of successes, Mo once said: "For me, it's all about goals. I feel happiest when i achieve a goal and then move on to the next one, and then the next one."

Jan Zelezny

The Sick Child Whose Back Always Hurt

In his childhood, Jan Zelezny was often sick, injured and miserable. Every few weeks he'd get fever, and it entailed frequent visits to the hospital. Plus, his back always hurt. His parents were deeply worried for him, and his studies got severely affected due to his infirmity. The doctor suggested that Jan should be enlisted in sports for his health to improve. While growing up, Jan's passion was handball, and even his doctor felt that his fitness was more suited to ball sports. But his father, who was a javelin thrower, introduced him to the sport and Jan took to it somewhat reluctantly. He found it too demanding initially but his father persisted and started coaching him.

From the very beginning of his sporting career, Jan had many injuries and the trouble with his back

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continued. As a junior and youth athlete, his performances were good but not outstanding. Try as he might, he never had a podium finish at a major tournament till he was 21. One day, after yet another unsuccessful tournament, Jan's father took him for a walk. He asked him to name a goal which he considered impossible but would love to achieve. Jan ruminated on this question for a long while and then replied: "I'd love to become a multiple Olympic champion, who can easily throw above 90 metres!" At that time, Czechoslovakia did not have any history of accomplishment in javelin, and none of their players had ever medalled at the Olympics. Jan had to become his own inspiration from that point.

He committed himself to a rigorous training routine and went from being a very promising player to an excellent one. At the 1988 Seoul Olympics, he won the silver medal and came within a hair's breadth of the gold medal. Though he was distraught, that performance gave him the confidence that he could be the very best javelin thrower in the world.

In the summer of 1990, he had his breakthrough performance at a meet in Oslo, where he broke the world record. After the meet, his back pain worsened and medical examinations showed extensive damage to two vertebrae. Doctors told him that he risked serious injury

JAN ZELEZNY

if he continued. Some even said that he might never be able to throw a javelin again.

Jan patiently made corrections to his throwing stance but continued unnerved, concertedly focusing on his goal. At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, he won the gold with a throw of 89.66 metres. The name of his country in subsequent years changed from Czechoslovakia to Czech Republic but his spectacular run continued unabated with two more gold medals at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

In between, at a meet in Jena, Germany, in 1996, he sent his javelin at a distance of 98.48 meters, which, almost three decades later, is still the world record. Over his two-decade career, in addition to the three Olympic golds, he racked up three world championship golds and six world records. Besides, most spectacularly, he threw over 90 metres more than 50 times, while no other player in history has managed more than 10 times! When he retired, he was given the epithet "The King of Javelin".

Jan once told a group of javelin enthusiasts: "I was never the strongest athlete physically, but it was my strong will to achieve my goals that made me throw the farthest!"

Coach K

The Coach Who Was Considered a Misfit

When the US national team lost three games at the 2004 Athens Olympics, including the semifinals, it was considered its worst-ever performance in basketball — not just at the Olympics but at the world stage. To rectify that, USA Basketball put together a project called “Redeem Team” and appointed Michael Krzyzewski, popularly known as “Coach K”, as the head coach. The goal was to win the gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. By then, Coach K had already built a reputation as one of the finest college basketball coaches in the US. However, many NBA players, including LeBron James, who were part of the national team, thought that Coach K would be a misfit as they felt he did not have abundant experience working with professional athletes.

COACH K

At the very initial stages of Coach K's tenure with the national team came his first major test when the team travelled to Japan for the 2006 FIBA World Cup. They lost in the semifinals to Greece, and Coach K could hear murmurs of discontent behind his back. After the tournament, he went back home and launched a deep introspection. He said: "Being the chief national coach is the greatest honour and also the biggest responsibility anyone could have been given. I don't want to ever take it lightly. There are countless people who have made untold sacrifices so that i or someone else could even touch a basketball, leave aside represent our country. The best way to uphold their sacrifices is to consistently win the gold medal for my country at the biggest of stages. So second best is just not an option for me. From now, i will *only* go for the gold."

When the team assembled a few months later for their training camp in Las Vegas, Coach K gave customised notebooks to all the players and support staff. On the very first page was printed an image of the Olympic gold medal. Coach K told the gathering emphatically: "From now on, i want everyone to keep the goal of gold front and centre, and never take their eyes off it."

To keep his players motivated and emotionally charged, he started inviting a cross-section of inspirational

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figures, from army officers to champions in other sports, to give them a pep talk every day. At the end of every session, Coach K would underscore the value of winning a gold medal for the pride of the country.

After that camp, Coach K and the US national basketball team became unstoppable on the global stage. Over the next 10 years, they did not lose a single match internationally and racked up 75 wins on the trot! They won gold medals at the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympics besides gold medals at the 2010 and the 2014 FIBA World Cup. When he was inducted into the United States Olympic Hall of Fame, he said: "Every winner's ultimate goal should be about inspiring future generations with the power of infinite possibilities."

Jesse Owens

The Athlete Who Proved Hitler Wrong

Born in 1913, Jesse Owens was the grandson of a slave and the son of a farmer. He was the seventh child of his parents. He was born during the worst period of racial segregation in the US when African-Americans were deprived of even the most basic civil rights. As a youth, Owens took different menial jobs in his spare time: he delivered groceries, loaded freight cars, and worked in a shoe repair shop while his father and older brother worked at a steel mill. He started running when he was 15. Because his family was very poor, he used to work after school and practise before school. Seeing the impoverished condition of his family deeply affected the young Jesse, and he resolved to do something about it. Once, while having dinner with his family, he declared: "One day, i am

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going to be the best track and field star in the world, and i am going to win more Olympic gold medals than any other athlete.”

True to his promise, he soon became a star athlete and broke the 100-yard world record while he was still in high school. He continued to perform exceptionally as an athlete throughout his academic years. Because his means were limited, he worked as a waiter and a gas station attendant while continuing to train. Once, when he was in college, he fell from stairs and hurt his back badly. He was in such severe pain that he was unable to walk. Doctors told him to take a few months off from competition. But a few days later was the biggest intercollegiate competition in the US. For years, Jesse's goal was to win the gold in that competition. So, going against conventional wisdom, he showed up for the competition. Even his coach advised him to participate in only one event. But Jesse went on to participate in all four of his events: 100 m, 200 m, long jump and relay. Not just that, he won a gold medal in all four events, while breaking three world records and equalling a fourth one, within a span of 45 minutes! His accomplishment is widely considered by experts as “the best 45 minutes in the history of sport”.

Then came the biggest test of his life: the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Hitler wanted to prove “Aryan

JESSE OWENS

superiority” to the world, and he subjected Jesse to racial epithets and other forms of mistreatment. But Jesse was unnerved. He had a clear goal: to win more Olympic gold medals than any other athlete in history. He stayed focused despite the challenges and then within three epic days, went on to win four gold medals. His feat is till date considered the “greatest athletic feat in history”. It shattered Hitler’s Nazi supremacy theory and showcased to a bitterly divided world that all humans are equal and that we all are only as big as our goals. Asked about his iconic feat, Jesse said the gold medals were his motivation: “If you don’t try to win, you might as well hold the Olympics in someone’s backyard. The thrill of competing carries with it the thrill of a gold medal, and that’s the most important thing!”

Karoly Takacs

The Right-hander Who Won With His Left

By the year 1936, Karoly Takacs was a renowned pistol shooter and considered the best in the world. His burning goal in life was to win an Olympic gold. But he was denied a place in the team for the 1936 Berlin Olympics on the basis that he was merely a sergeant, and the team was only open to higher-ranked officers. That unfair restriction was lifted after those Olympics, so Karoly started preparing zealously for the 1940 Olympics.

High on hopes and dreams, Karoly practised relentlessly. But, two years later, Karoly suffered a massive setback, this time one that appeared to have ended his career. During army training in 1938, a faulty grenade exploded and shattered his right hand — the one he used to fire a pistol — to the extent that he could never use it again.

KAROLY TAKACS

Karoly spent a month in the hospital. Unbeknown to anyone, between visits by the doctor and his family, he started teaching himself to shoot with his left hand. He thought, "Rather than worrying about what i don't have. let me see what i can do with what i have!" Once he was discharged, he spent many more months practising in private. The very next year, he went on to win the Hungarian national pistol championship. The world was stunned. But the way Karoly saw it, he had a goal to fulfil and nothing could come in the way.

However, just like ascending a high mountain entails an arduous climb, fulfilling a big goal entails rocksolid patience. In 1940, Karoly's dream of winning the Olympic gold was again shattered. This time because the IOC cancelled the Olympics due to the ongoing World War II. Karoly, though disappointed, kept hanging on. His goal of gold was too valuable for him to abandon. He waited for another four years, hoping to fulfill his incomplete dream in 1944. However, the Olympics of 1944 too had to be cancelled due to the continued war. Many people told Karoly that he was star-crossed, that it wasn't in his destiny to win the Olympic gold — why else would he keep experiencing one calamity after another! They asked him to drop his goal. But Karoly was not a man who would let go of his dream — he was made of much stronger stuff.

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By the 1948 London Olympics, Karoly was 38. Experts and players thought he was way past his prime, and he was no longer considered the favourite to win the gold. Before the event, Karoly was asked what was he there for. He said he was there to learn. To everyone's surprise, Karoly went on not only to win the gold medal but also set a new world record in the rapid-fire pistol event by 10 points. He thus became the first athlete with a disability to win an Olympic medal in shooting.

After the Olympics, Karoly heard some people saying that his win was a fluke and could never be repeated. So, he took it upon himself to demonstrate that he could do it again at the highest level and set a new goal: to become a multiple Olympic champion.

He prepared with the same zeal and fervour as he'd always done, and defying all odds, he went on to win the gold medal in the same event at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics too. His spirit and resolve eventually earned him a place in the Olympics Heroes list of the International Olympic Committee. He once famously said: "Winning the gold is less about the hand and more about the mind. If you truly believe that you can do it, then you will do it, however long it takes!"

About the Author

Born in Jammu to Veenaa and Sham Kishore, Vickrant Mahajan studied commerce at the University of Jammu, publishing at the University of Denver and filmmaking at the New York Film Academy. In 2001, he started his professional career as an editor with HarperCollins Publishers India. In 2003, he won the first runner-up and Mr Photogenic at the Grasim Mr India pageant. In 2012, he made his Bollywood debut with the film *Challo Driver*, which he wrote, directed, produced and acted in. In 2014, he became the first person in the world to speak continuously and unscripted for over 48 hours at a stretch on a single topic.

Among his many Guinness World Records are the longest speech, longest play, largest book signing, largest greeting card, most football penalties in 24 hours, most basketball passes in 1 minute, longest squash rally and the largest underwater painting exhibition in the world.

GOAL IS GOLD

In 2019, Vickrant was appointed as Team India's motivator for the senior world wrestling championship in Nursultan, Kazakhstan — the first time something like this happened in Indian sport. It turned out to be the best-ever world championship for India as it won five medals and had four direct Olympic qualifications. In 2020, Vickrant motivated Team India to its best-ever Olympic qualifying tournament in Amman, Jordan, where 9 out of 13 boxers qualified for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, setting a new Olympic qualification record for India. At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Vickrant's mentee, wrestler Ravi Dahiya, became India's first male Olympic medallist after a gap of 9 years.

Vickrant has authored 35 books, including *Yes Thank You Universe*, *Superpositivity*, *Stretch Yourself*, *The Glacier River Ocean Principle* and *Goalete*. Vickrant is the creator of the Superpositivity philosophy and the first person to use the term Superpositivity in mainstream human consciousness. He presently runs a consciousness organisation called Superpositivity Foundation. He shares the beautiful message of Superpositivity with people all over the world and inspires them to positively express their infinite potential in life.

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