



BETTER ATHLETES
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The Role of Character in Olympians

Robert Andrews is the founder and director of The Institute of Sports Performance in Houston, Texas. He specializes in helping athletes return to play after suffering serious sports-related injuries, works with athletes and coaches to maximize athletic performance and works with teams and sports organizations to build championship cultures. In addition to working with Olympic athletes Robert works with high school, college, elite and professional athletes.

Character is a critical component in the makeup of many great athletes. Working with Olympians -- such as gymnasts Simone Biles and Laurie Hernandez, and dozens of others current and past from seven different countries in men's and women's gymnastics, swimming, trampoline, track & field, judo, fencing, figure skating, and boxing over the last five Olympic games -- has allowed me to see the significant role that great character plays in an athlete's success.

As the Olympic Games begin, it is easy to sit back and enjoy remarkable displays of athleticism and courage. These Olympic moments go way beyond the physical. These performances call upon the heart, mind, and spirit of the athlete or in some instances the entire team. They move us profoundly because they reflect the culmination of a life long commitment to be the best.

We see our favorite athletes on television commercials, magazines, Internet ads, and billboards long before the Games begin. These athletes, due to their elite status, have already benefitted from corporate sponsorships and endorsements that allow them to live a very comfortable, and in the case of some athletes, a very luxurious lifestyle.

Behind the scenes, however, we see a very different way of living. A way of living, a personal culture, that serves as a powerful reminder of how character can define us and allow us to move to heights that most never deem possible.

In my work with Olympians and Olympic hopefuls I have observed one very strong and consistent theme with all of them. The ones that make it to the pinnacle of their sport seem to have remarkable and unwavering character.

There are common traits that Olympic athletes possess, which become obvious to those of us blessed to work closely with them over extended periods of time. Those traits, qualities and attributes allow them to focus on a goal for many, many years. They are able to ride the waves of suffering and struggle, success, elation, and celebration. Injuries, losses, falls, setbacks and failures all help to develop such character traits as resilience, focus, determination, and the ability to learn from struggle and failure. Success on the global level can build humility, empathy, compassion, gratitude, and the ability to focus on the present moment.

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The Role of Character in Olympians, Continued

These athletes have learned that developing their character in the end can be the difference between those who become Olympians and those who don't. That does not mean that every athlete who becomes an Olympian has great character, nor that athletes who fall short of the Olympics have character flaws or weaknesses. However, developing character is where we often focus when we want to add a dimension that maximizes an athlete's physical talent.

Over the course of helping athletes strive to make the last five Olympic Games, I have observed that strong character is a critical cornerstone to those who are honored to represent their country at the world's biggest sporting event.

So sit back and enjoy the Games. And look for the remarkable character these athletes display. If you are like me it will move you to tears.