



THE SMILE WITHIN

**GUIDE TO BECOMING A
BETTER ATHLETE!**

Written by
ATed Eckersdorff



The Smile Within

Guide to becoming a better athlete...Faster!

By Ted Eckersdorff

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Introduction

“Structure is the basis for flight”

The purpose of this book is to show the various traits that make a successful athlete. Over four decades of athletics and coaching I found certain traits that when used as described in this book, will make you a better athlete, no matter what sport, activity, or level of participation. There will be victories, defeats, mistakes, luck, and success, but here is a road map or “structure” to help you achieve success in a shorter amount of time. Why take the slow meandering back roads when you could take a super highway to your destination. Wishing you the best in this journey.

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- My name is Ted Eckersdorff and I was a member of the U.S. Army Elite Athlete Program on the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Team. My Army MOS, job description, was “physical activities specialist” and my work was to compete in the five sports of the modern pentathlon to the best of my ability.
- I was born in Manhattan N.Y. and moved to Queens when I was five. I loved physical activity and had a wonderful grandfather who positively influenced me to play and have fun, and who loved being physical himself.
- Later, as a swimmer and Captain of the Queens College swim team, a teacher on the physical ed. staff, Dr. Hadden Speakman told me about this sport called modern pentathlon.
- Modern Pentathlon is an Olympic event that combines 5 diverse sports. In 1912, Baron de Coubertin designed this event to represent those skills necessary for the successful military courier of Napoleonic days. The courier had to ride an unfamiliar horse over obstacles. Then use a pistol to shoot the enemy, and when that was empty, take out his sword and duel, swim across a raging river, and run to his final destination. From these beginnings formed the event which tests the athlete for running, swimming, equestrian, pistol shooting and fencing.
- Dr. Speakman told me that if in two weeks, I could run two miles under 12 minutes, he could get me into a junior development clinic in San Antonio Texas. With my strong swim/run combination, they would then teach me the three other skill events of: pistol shooting, epee fencing and show jumping.
- It was an exciting opportunity. Two weeks later on a Sunday morning, my mom, dad, brother and friend, John Villanachi gathered around the track as I ran my first ever two miles in 11:52. As I was lying on the track in exhaustion and satisfaction, Dr. Haddon Speakman told my dad of the many opportunities awaiting me with this successful athletic result. My dad, a German immigrant who was in a Hitler work camp sincerely only wanted me to have a good life and be successful in whatever endeavor I wanted to choose. He did not care about sports, but perhaps without realizing it he was a fantastic dad because he did not meddle in what I wanted to do with my life, and just let me be.
- Below is a photo of my Pop and I.



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- I qualified for the Junior Development Camp of 1974, and met some great swim/run athletes and many excellent pentathletes. At the end of the summer, I was third in the novice division and was very happy with the result. The following year on my own initiative, I went to Warendorf Germany, to a pentathlon sports school to study and train the skill events in the pentathlon. Thrown from many different horses multiple times, humbled in pistol shooting, and while failing sometimes in fencing, I ended up with some very successful fencing results. It was important to learn about time management when training in a multi disciplined sport. Also, how to emotionally deal with success in one event and poor or mediocre results in another. The pentathlon was all about putting five diverse events together in a five day competition. Perfection was rarely in the mix. Fight, scrape, learn, claw and do the best you can do for that competition. Let the chips fall where they may. Great, good or bad, accept the final result, learn from it and move on to get better.
- In 1978, having already done pentathlon for four years as a civilian, I joined the Army specifically to do modern pentathlon, in an elite program that was established in 1955, by Colonel John Russell a member of the 1948 and 1952 Equestrian Olympic Team. It was a very exciting time!
- Here are some of my accomplishments:
 - Member of the U.S. Modern Pentathlon National Team for 10 years from 1976-1986.
 - Queens College of C.U.N.Y. Swim Team Captain and M.V.P.
 - 1977-Athlete-Scholar Award

- 1978 Modern Pentathlon U.S. National Championships -First place-equestrian event
- 1979 C.I.S.M. [Conseil Internationale du Sport Militaire] World Championships- Silver medal-team
- 1980 European Championships-First place equestrian event
- 1981 U.S. Pentathlon Nationals-First place-fencing, qualified for the World Championships
- 1981 C.I.S.M. World Championships-Ninth place, bronze medal-team
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- 1982 U.S. Fencing Nationals-First place epee team event
- 1982 U.S. Triathlon Championships [swim, run, pistol shoot]-First place-team
- 1984 U.S. Olympic Trials-First place-equestrian event
- 1986-Athletes Representative –U.S.O.C. National Sports Festival
- Competed in approximately 23 U.S. National Championships in modern pentathlon, fencing, and triathlon and three U.S. Olympic Trials, 1976, 1980 and 1984.
- However, I was not a member of the U.S. Olympic Team!

The Smile Within

- “How to become a better athlete...
Faster!”



- 1981 World Championships-Opening Ceremony carrying the U.S. flag
- The Success Equation
- After competing for many years at various levels, and now coaching for the past 25 years, I have developed a success equation.
- Success=Talent [DNA] + Hard work + Serendipity

- Whatever level of athletic success you wish to attain equals the DNA that you inherited from your parents, which you can only change minimally. Add hard work and training to the genes you inherited. This is the biggest area for you to make changes to get better and see improvement. Finally, add in serendipity, or luck and timing.
- What can we take away from this equation? An awareness of how to attain success. A roadmap to get you there, and the awakenings of “how can I be the best that I want to be”. The hard work in the equation is the “want to get better” and does require either internal self motivation or external motivation. Talent and serendipity do not require motivation, they just are. You have little to no control over them. The amount of hard work and effort you put in, is something you can change and improve upon. Are you ready for the challenge?



- “Taking Responsibility - For my success or failure”
- I learned to take responsibility for my success or failure. Learning over time that only I can direct my life in the direction I want. If success is my goal, recognize that others assist me but ultimately success falls on my shoulders. Coaches, parents, mentors, friends can help, and are great motivators, but when on the athletic field, it is just me out there. That is the essence of taking responsibility. I just did not fall into athletic success, but had to

have that as my goal internally. Initially taking responsibility means just following your passion in finding the sport or exercise that you enjoy and feel you can excel at. However after a while if you became stuck at a certain level of achievement, it is at that time that you need to start thinking about taking responsibility and how that concept can help you.

Don't blame others if it is not a smooth ride. If the goal is not achievable in the moment, how will changing course get you there faster. I am the Captain of my ship, and success or failure depends on you. Ultimately you are in the ring with sweat on your face, and "Champion of your fate".

- Why not me...Why not you! Why should it be someone else who succeeds? Why not YOU? Now.



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- " PERSISTANCE"
- "Happy are those who dream dreams, and are willing to pay the price to make them come true."
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- Failed many times. Many times, and succeeded many times. Then at some point I started succeeding more times than failing. Many more. It may look like a straight line but there were up-ups and down-downs all along the way that made the journey interesting. Having the long term goals to succeed, continually kept me on the path to my ultimate destination.
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At my first Junior National Championships, I started out the day with one victory and nine defeats. Oh, by the way, in the modern pentathlon fencing, every competitor fences every other athlete for only one touch. Win, get more points, lose and get no points. It is the event that separates the competitors.

So there I was, feeling like I had a dark negative dark cloud over me. “One win and nine DEFEATS” and a long day ahead of me. Went outside and had my first talk with myself. It went something like this. Leave your junky bad attitude out here. Go back in and start all over, and I mean start from the next moment, and just get the next touch. One touch. Stay in the moment and only win the next bout. The next match. I finished sixth in the event that day, but the experience of leaving my mistakes outside stayed with me and was used many more times.

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- I stuck to my plan, and persevered, found some success and continued going forward step by step until my goals were attained.
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- I was not the best target pistol shooter, so one year I had a long discussion with my shooting coach, Henry, we started a program to improve my shooting. One hour before lunch, and one and a half hours after lunch. This was putting in a lot of time that took away from other events, but I had to improve this event, Now. And I had to be persistent in attaining my success.



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- “CONSISTENCY”
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- Day in and day out! Long before Nike’s “Just do it”, there was a phrase “Nothing to do, but to do it”
- Running is a sport that if you have good technique, you need to go out and consistently run. This means day in and day out. When you are tired, when it’s raining, when you want to sleep in, and certainly when you want to put it off until tomorrow. Run, and do the workouts your coach tells you to do. Run again.

- Feel free to think about your particular sport or activity. Can you see how being persistent would improve your results? Over the years I improved my two mile run time from 11:52 to 9:50. Run, be consistent, do the right workouts to make yourself faster and persevere. You can never go back and get the day that you skipped. If it is not today, it may not happen. Consistency Now! Consistency over time leads to success! Be consistent in your training day in and day out and that consistency will pay off.
- Keep reviewing your goals and hold yourself accountable to being consistent. Your goals are the big picture. Doing the workouts can help you achieve your goals. Do you notice yourself getting closer or farther away from
- your goals?



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- “GO ALL OUT”
- I am grateful for going all out, 100% to be the best athlete I could be. This included training day in and day out and competing with everything I had in the moment. Whether competing in a local swim meet, a 10k run, fencing four hours on thursday evening competitions, or qualifying for the National Championships, I always tried to go all out and be content with where I finished. Of course, there are opportunities for improvement, but if someone was better than me and I went all out, good for them. I was personally satisfied with my results. In life there may be people better than you,[see Success Equation and talent/DNA], but knowing you went all out is liberating as you gave the best effort you possibly could have, whether it’s first, second or 43rd.
- When you know that you truly gave 100%, you have come in first place.
- Look inside of yourself when no one is around. How do you think you are doing? If the

answer is positive, great. Stay on track. If not, this is just a moment in time for you to check in internally, digest the feedback that maybe you could be doing better, or change some things and move on from there. Going all out is based on one person's opinion. Yours.



- 1978 Modern Pentathlon National Championships-Equestrian event -1st place
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- “ LEARN-Learn from everything”
- No matter what you do, learn from everything! I learned from poor performances where I was definitely not happy with my results, and learned from good outcomes. Be open to try new and different ideas, and training strategies, and you will be better for it, and more successful. Learning from all the various situations including victories and defeats, makes you a better athlete and person. Keep your eyes and ears open. See what's going on around you. Are there area's where you think you can improve? Could speaking to a coach or mentor help? Use this learned information to make yourself better.
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- I also learned through sports that anything is possible! Yes. There are only your perceived limitations of how good you can become. It is possible that you can train harder, smarter, and longer. You can develop a “no limits” attitude. Whenever you see an obstacle, be aware that you can get beyond it.
 - There was a story of the shark and minnow in the same pool. They put a glass partition in the pool and the shark, trying to get the minnow banged his head four or five times on the glass partition. Then they took out the glass partition but the shark never tried again because he did not want to feel that negative

reinforcement. Alas, at this new moment in time there was nothing to stop the shark from being successful except his own perceptions. He never tried to swim across the pool again. I think the minnow was okay with that but it did not help the shark. It's OK to have a sore head from failure, but remember when you are ready-No limits!

- Roger Bannister did this, also, when he broke the four minute mile. It was a perceived limitation and with mental and physical training he went beyond that limitation.
- One of my first cross country races I made a mental commitment prior to the race that when I reached the "pain threshold" where the lactic acid in the blood tells you to slow down, I would say NO, go faster. I did that for the whole two mile race. "No, go faster." It was just a way to test and break my mental limits of endurance. I did this many times in swimming and running to break perceived limitations that I had about how fast I could actually go. It was this internal mental attitude that has continued to this day. "No limits!" Anything is possible!

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- **USE FEEDBACK TO MAKE YOU MORE SUCCESSFUL**

- Don't expect success to be a straight line, in athletics, or life. Turn all feedback from others into positive information for you. If someone says you suck, put your head down, work hard, and show them and yourself how good you can get. Sometimes negative, demeaning feedback can motivate you to succeed. I know it did for me.
- It is up to you to decide which feedback you utilize. You decide if it is useful. If not, let go of the words and move on, but use the energy to make you better.

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- You can also use positive reinforcement to get better, and more successful. When you master both positive and negative feedback to your advantage, your road to success is easier and faster. Negative feedback may look like this: you'll never amount to anything, you're too small to be successful, we don't like you, get out of here, or I was brought up in a bad environment and it's too difficult to get out of it. Amazingly, these can all be powerful motivators. Also, while most people like positive feedback, can it make you complacent or is it truly a good motivator. You decide because you are now becoming the Captain of your Fate. Whatever arises, you know you are on your way to becoming a better athlete, and person. Learn to use the feedback to make yourself better.



- 1979 Military World Championships-Gold medal and an hour later our Coach came into my room and said there was a mistake in the scoring and we took silver, not gold. We had to swap medals with the French team. [no photo of that is available]

- “PROPER TECHNIQUE MAKES YOU BETTER “
- While training for five diverse sports I took thousands of lessons in the five different sports, and listened to many, many different coaches on the nuances of all the different events. I learned that proper technique definitely produces better results. This is good to know because without any additional effort, proper technique will make you a better athlete.
- Practice alone, does not make you perfect, but perfect practice with correct technique makes you perfect.
- Below is a typical training schedule for the five sports in modern pentathlon.
- It’s all about consistent hard work, but also resting/sleep to let the body recover from the hard workouts. Naps were a critical component of my success, and still are. Hard work is important, but taking care of your body thru giving it proper food, sleep and keeping it healthy and strong are equally important.
- For example, when you feel burnt out, overtrained, what actions do you take? Drive on or try or do an easy workout for the next couple of days till you feel strong again.

TRAINING SCHEDULE--EFFECTIVE 14 JAN 80						ATHLETES
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
0730-0930 Fence-Gp A Ride- Gp B	0730-0900 Run-All	1000-1130 Ride-All	0730-0900 Run-All	0730-0930 Fence-Gp B Ride- Gp A	0800 Run-All	<p>GROUP A</p> FITZGERALD LOSEY WITHERS YUNKER GLENESK, N. BURLEY CAIN DRIGGS GLENESK, D. BERES ECKERSDORFF MOREAU FRENCH/HUNGARIANS <p>GROUP B</p> BRYNESTAD PAULSON DALTON CAMPBELL RUDDOCK HASSON HELMICK MICHAELS SPENCER MORR CHADASIEWICZ ALL FOREIGNERS (ROODZANT, PETRAEUS, LEKANDER, ALEXANDER, STOCKER) STORM
1000-1200 Fence-Gp B Ride- Gp A	1000-1130 Shoot-Gp A		1000-1130 Shoot-Gp B	1000-1200 Fence-Gp A Ride- Gp B	1030 Shoot-All	
1330-1500 Swim-All	1300-1430 Shoot-Gp B Swim	1330-1500 Swim-All	1300-1430 Shoot-Gp A	1330-1500 Swim-All		
	1800-2030 Fence-All		1800-2030 Fence-All			

- Train like a Champion. Think like a Champion. Visualize yourself achieving your goals. How does it feel? Do you take better care of your body that is the vehicle to success? Eating healthier foods? Are you walking around with a little more swagger? You can. It’s a great motivator. If not, Why?



1981 C.I.S.M. Championships-Bronze medal-team

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- “KEEP TRACK OF YOUR PROGRESS”
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- Keep a daily athletic diary. A journal records how your training is going and can note progress over time and is valuable in seeing patterns that can either create success or maybe see where problems lie. Write your workouts and any comments you have that day in the diary and review it periodically. Keeping a diary to track your progress is the best way to verify that you are being consistent, or not. It can also tell you that you are overtraining, undertraining, or on course which are all valuable feedbacks to staying on track.
- I have really noticed this in my coaching. A few of my athletes were not getting better but they told me they were training on their own. After a month of putting them on a diary system, they thought they were being consistent but it showed two days in a row of exercise, a lapse of four days, one day of work out, three days off, three days on. They were not being consistent and the diary system was a verification of that. You can see why a diary to track your progress can be of value.



“THINK- HOW CAN I BE THE BEST”

- Can you be flexible enough in your thinking to say “I am not doing well enough right now, and I need to make changes to attain more success?” I need to change and go on a totally different path to achieve the success I want. Challenging, but I want to attain success.





“NOW- the only time there is”

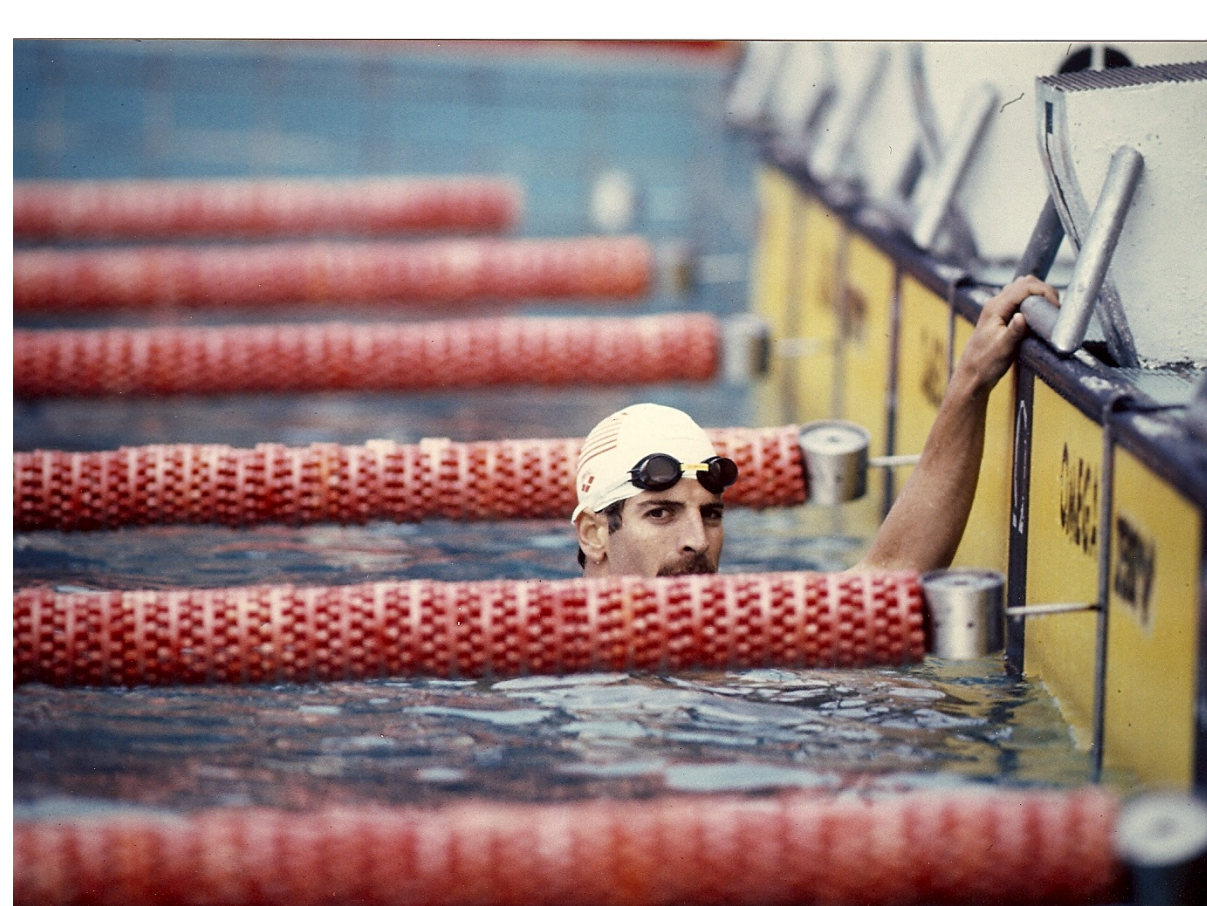


1981 World Championships-Running event

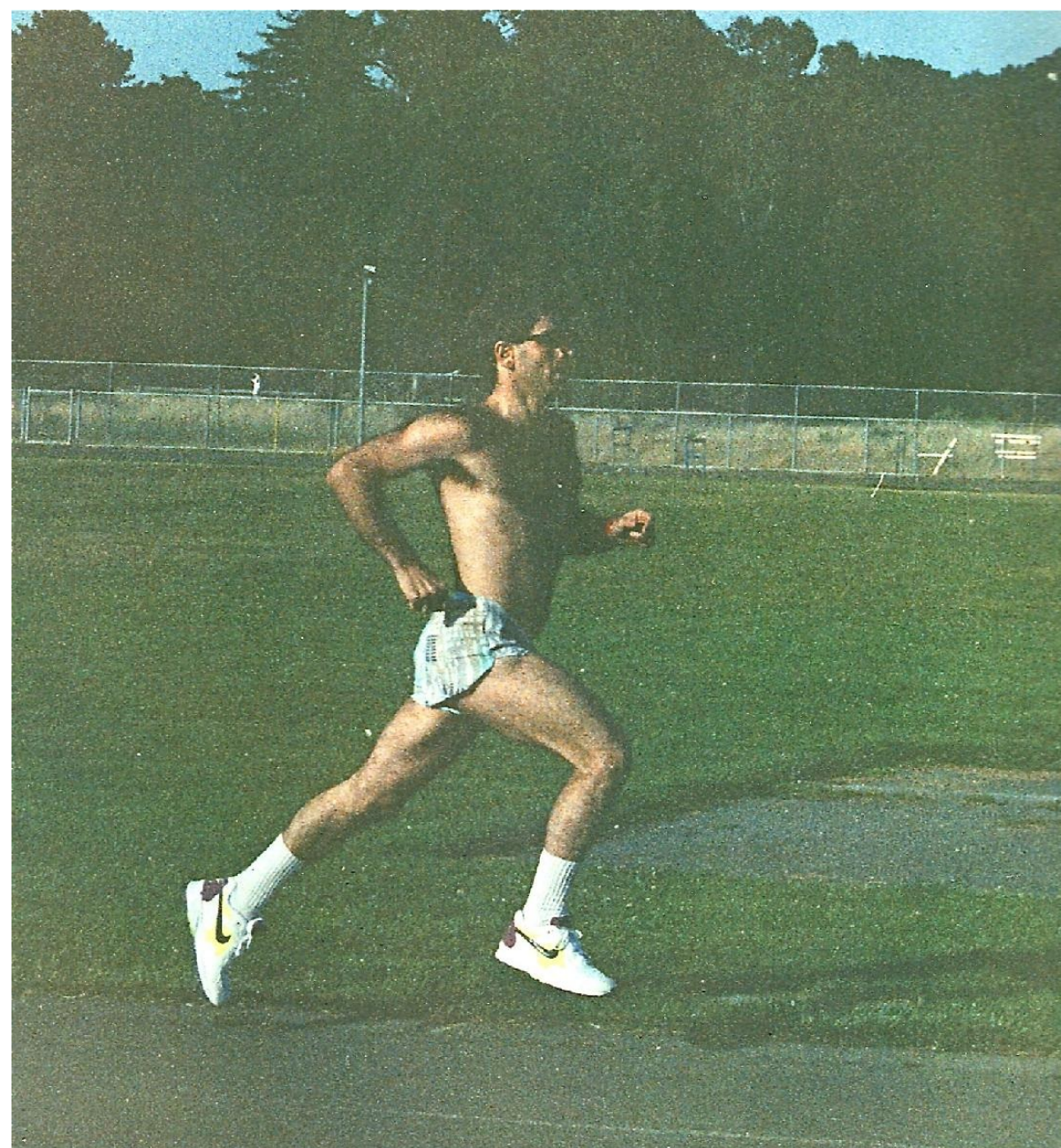
“NOW-the only time there is”



“NOW-the only time there is”



“NOW-the only time there is “



“NOW-the only time there is”

“The “Smile” Within “

- Have fun. What does that really mean? When competing or training and working out, I rarely smiled. However, that satisfied, at peace feeling that you are doing exactly what you want to do more than anything else in the world is what makes everything, all right. I was passionate about what I was doing and felt that passion deep within. This feeling, the “Smile Within” is what kept me on the path to success through many difficult times. To know the smile within, made everything all right. If you have that smile within, you know you are on the right track. Yes!

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- If you cannot find it, maybe you are on the wrong path for you. Can you change something? Would changing sports be the answer?

Maybe try a different schedule. Acknowledge that you can't find your Smile and look at that. Try pottery, painting, persist again, take a break... Go for a walk now.



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...where is my smile within...oh, there it is

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- ...Oops, stage fencing photo taken much later on in life...
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- In retrospect, I realized that I had all these traits/characteristics before I became a world class athlete. I took the traits that God gave me, DNA, and applied them to my passion, which was exercise and athletics. Find your “Smile Within” and go all out after that passion. I believe that if I had a passion for art or business, like I did for sports, I would have taken those same traits and applied them to my “passion du jour”.
- What I do give myself credit for though is that I saw things around me that could make me better and used them to make myself better. Took advantage of everything around me that I thought would make me a better athlete. I was open to different training ideology, learning from everything and taking in feedback, using what fit, and letting the other stuff go in one ear and out the other. Learn and be open to new ideas to make yourself better.
- I had a friend of mine, Sandy, who was on the U.S. team with me and at the time he
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- shot a perfect 200 score in a competition. I peppered him with questions on how he did it, what he was thinking about, what was his mental procedure internally, and anything else I could ask him to get insight on how I could improve from hearing how he had accomplished that feat.
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- I did the same thing with Great Britain's Olympic gold medalist, Jeremy Fox, when he was training in the United States. I asked him how to become a better equestrian. One of the most important things learned from him was that if you want to become a better rider, you always have to be thinking of how to become a better athlete. He told me that sitting on top of the horse and hoping the horse jumps the course the right way will not make you consistently successful. It was valuable advice that was used many times. I would go to horse shows and watch the best riders and see what they did.
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- Mental visualization to improve technique by watching the best performers is also a valuable tool. Just by watching the best, the brain makes its own connections for you to get better also. So observe the best and know that you are getting better at the same time.
- I also had a swim coach who had only one plaque on his desk. It said "Don't mistake activity for achievement". Loved that advice. Going through the motion is a lot different than putting effort and hard work into what you are doing? How do you think you are doing?



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- “TIME MANAGEMENT”
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- The five diverse sports in pentathlon offer a unique opportunity to become successful in life. For one, you need to maximize your time management skills, be organized, or you will not be able to handle training for five sports.
- Maximizing efficiency helps stack success in your favor. Being efficient makes things easier.
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- Therefor, set goals, plan, actualize the plan, learn to be in the present moment, persevere, be flexible to change strategies, see where your weaknesses are, develop
- plans for improvement, and learn to live with your results, good or bad. That is the definition of success.
- ...”And what is more, you will be a Man, my son... or a successful Woman”.



- “LIFELONG FITNESS”
- I found out that I really enjoyed working out. While I do believe in lifelong fitness, I really

just like working out and exercising day

- in and day out. Being in the Moment feels great, and exercise helps me be present, like meditation, and because it makes me feel good Now, today, I enjoy doing it.

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- To summarize, I found the best way to become successful is to:

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- Be consistent day in and day out.

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- Be persistent and keep on going in the face of any odds or limitations! Go forward and... No limits.

- Take responsibility for your outcome. You either succeeded or failed in the moment.

- Learn from success and failure. Learn.

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- Take in feedback. If you like it, use it to your advantage and if you don't, let it go and move on. Now is time to move on.

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- BE in the present moment—Now.

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- When you get positive results, exult in them and use them to motivate you to greater achievement. When you get negative results, you can also use them to motivate you to greater achievement. Then let them go, and move on from your failure or mistakes.

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- Success is rarely a straight line. Knowing this helps you through the ups and downs on your journey to success.

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- Learn and implement time management into all that you do. Become an efficient machine.

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- We are all human beings, and we all put our pants on one leg at a time and if I can do what I did, I know you can also do whatever you most desire.

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- If, after reading all this, you can in some way improve how you become successful in a shorter amount of time than normal trial and error, then I have succeeded in disseminating this information correctly. I made lots of mistakes along the way and having some sort of road map or structure to succeed would have been very helpful.

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- Wishing you all the best as you attain your dreams and goals.

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Pentathletes head for world championships



San Antonio Light photo by Robert Barnes

Ready to fly to Zielona Gora, Poland for next week's Modern Pentathlon world games was the U.S. contingent, from left, of national treasurer Ralph Bender, coach Col. John Rus-

sell, pentathletes Ted Eckerdorff, Dean Glenesk, Robert Nieman and Col. John Lingo, officer-in-charge. Not present for picture was pentathlete Mike Burley.

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- Ted at 60 years of age, still having fun!



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