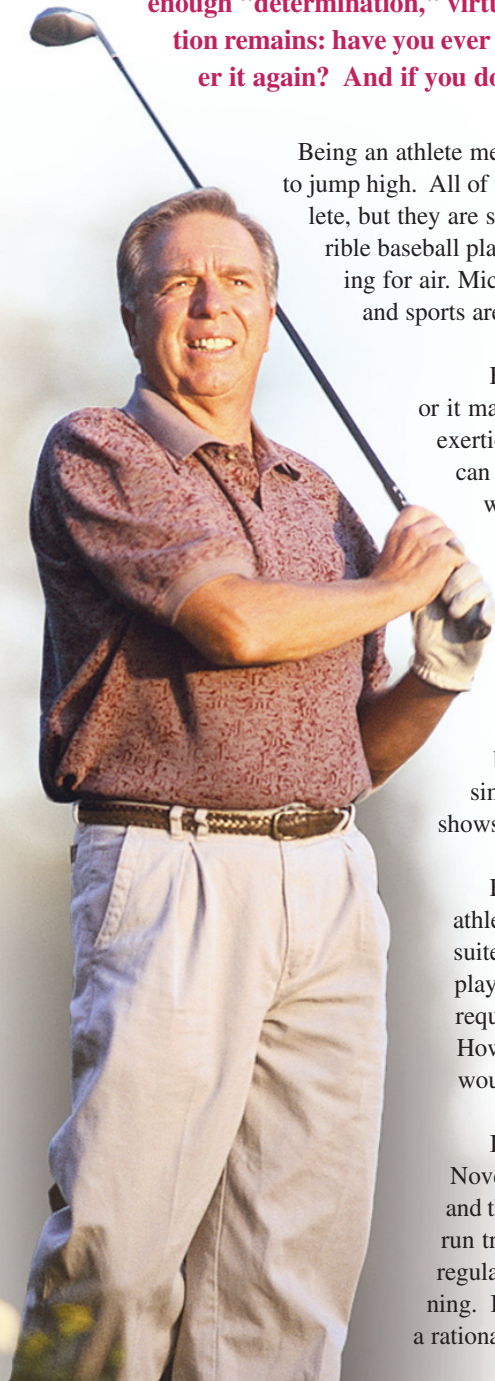


Earning Your **Athlete**

By Brian K. Sims

As a former championship high school football player, captain of a Division II National Championship football team, and regional All-American defensive tackle, I want to let you in on a little secret about athletes...you are one too! I know you're not about to one-up Shaq, and you'll probably never best Venus or Serena, or even Michelle Wei, but the deep, dark secret of gymnasiums, courts, fields, tracks, and locker rooms everywhere is that given enough "motivation" and given enough "determination," virtually anyone can uncover his or her inner capacity for athletics. The question remains: have you ever uncovered "your athlete"? Are you willing to work hard enough to uncover it again? And if you do, will you earn the right to keep "your athlete" throughout your life?



Being an athlete means so much more than a bench press, long drive, hard sprint, or an uncanny ability to jump high. All of these things may make a person a better athlete, and perhaps even a professional athlete, but they are simply tools for specific sports. The truth is that Shaquille O'Neal is probably a horrible baseball player. The William's sister's couldn't swim more than two laps in a pool without gasping for air. Michelle Wei would likely crumble under a collision with an NFL linebacker. Athletics and sports are similar, but not synonymous.

Finding "your athlete" may mean finding a platform in which to propel that athlete, or it may simply mean finding that part of yourself that has the ability to maintain physical exertion and thrive as a result. In many respects, athletics are like musical ability. While I can barely hum a Yitzhak Pearlman violin solo, I could certainly learn to play the guitar well enough to strum a few Beatles' tunes. Human beings have the capacity to learn music and to become musicians. While it's true that only a select few will become professionals, the measure of a musician is not whether or not they are paid; it's their ability to produce music. The same is true of athletes.

"Your athlete" may be a swimmer, a runner, a cyclist, a rower, or a sportsman and it is probably more likely than not that you have no idea what 'your athlete' really is. Your mission is first to take steps to uncover that athlete. Whether it be cardiovascular training such as running or swimming, or weightlifting, or even simply dieting, you need to put yourself in a position to recognize when 'your athlete' shows an interest or inclination towards a particular athletic endeavor...then jump in!

For me, after a decade of weightlifting, football, and wind sprints, I learned that "my athlete" is an ultra-competitive, professional triathlete. The truth is that I was very well suited for football for the majority of my ten years on the field. Thankfully, as I stopped playing the sport, my body no longer needed the sheer girth and strength that the sport required. I've literally run miles in an attempt to expedite the sliming-down process. However, while I'd like for "my athlete" to be a runner, with two rebuilt knees, my body would like nothing less.

I still run, quite a bit actually, and I'm even training for the Philadelphia Marathon in November. If all goes well, I'll finish with the hundreds of other first-time marathoners and then, just like the majority of that crowd, I may never run another marathon again. I've run triathlons, 5Ks, 10K, ten milers and more, and after this marathon I'll have run most regular races that a runner can run without getting into the upper echelon of endurance running. I still consider myself more of a cross trainer than a runner, but this could also just be a rationalization for still not knowing what kind of athlete I am.

Either way, I think "my athlete" doesn't mind running, but it sure doesn't enjoy it. Perhaps 'my athlete' is a mountain climber, a hiker, or maybe an adventure sports buff. I simply don't know yet. What I do know is that in order for me to find out, I need to make sure that "my athlete" is given every opportunity to explore new events and activities and hopefully somewhere along the way I'll discover my forte.

My message is that athletics are not some miracle from above, a gift from an athletic parent, or a side effect of a pill or supplement. Athletics are a part of all of our genes and probably have been ever since we clubbed our first Brontosaur and dragged him back to the cave. Somewhere beneath our doughy, modern-day physiques and our under-whelmed, under-worked sense of adventure lay the hearts, minds, and bodies, of athletes. You simply need to find yours.



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