

GRIT VERSUS TALENT

WHAT COUNTS THE MOST?

I remember sitting on the floor of the football change rooms, my head hung in my hands, three quarter time in junior league footy. The room was far too quiet for a team of young, aspiring footballers with the mood seriously dimmed from our current losing status, heads down and spirits only a few feet out of the gutter. The feeling of despair gripping more control of me than my ego would like to admit. I could only think of the bigger, better team that we would have to go out and face for another flogging one more time. And at the point of almost conceding defeat, I remember slowly looking up from my downward gaze and having something catch my attention from the corner of my eye. Just below the roof in a dark corner of the room was a very old, rusted sign covered in cobwebs. It was long and thin with only one sentence on it that could barely be read in its dilapidated and dusty state. But what I read on that sign has stuck in my mind ever since and has served me on countless occasions.



You've heard the stories. Whether it's that of Lance Armstrong attacking his gruelling training, rising through the ranks of the cycling world and then being struck down with brain, lung and testicular cancer without attaining his goal of winning the Tour de France. Then, suffering as the deadly disease ate away at his wasting body, all made worse by the endless chemo. Somehow, he still came back even stronger to win the Tour de France 7 times over.

Or maybe it's Thomas Edison trying and failing over and over again at the expense of his ridiculing adversaries before finally succeeding and etching his name in history. Or perhaps it's the untalented kid at school who you hear of later in life hitting it big because he or she stuck with the dream they had all those years before.

At some point you realise that there is a factor in the topic of success that goes beyond talent and ability. For there are far too many stories of success forged on hard work over talent and far too many talented people that don't have the same sort of story to tell.



Researchers such as Martin Seligman, most renowned for his work on optimism, and Angela Duckworth, are studying the varying impacts of '*grit*' versus intelligence or talent in the context of achievement. Grit is defined here as the determination to accomplish an ambitious, long-term goal despite the inevitable obstacles.

They are suggesting from their research that no more than a quarter of the differences between people in job performance and no more than a third of the difference in grade point average – can be attributed to IQ. Grit, on the other hand, which is a broad term for the inclusion of perseverance, self-discipline and hard work, contributes the other 75 percent, along with creativity and luck.

Another researcher, Louis Terman, performed a longitudinal study on a group of so called '*gifted*' boys from childhood to middle age to determine the factors and characteristics that differentiated the high achievers. He said that "persistence in the accomplishment of an end" was a major factor that distinguished the most successful from the least successful.

We've all heard it before, that "if you really want something you have to set your mind to it and be determined to work towards it", but it hasn't really been proven, until now. I guess it confirms what we inherently always knew.

And so it is with training. While the adage 'work smarter, not harder' is definitely pertinent and noteworthy, the ultimate rewards go to those who put in the work, week after week, month after month. No amount of sophistication will allay the fact that a revolutionary training regime, magic pill or miracle diet will never 'outsmart' the need for hard work. Just ask the professional athletes who are at the cutting edge of 'smarter' technology. They'll tell you what hard work and persistence is all about!

So, all the best with your training! Train smart, and be consistent. But remember that only grit and persistence will draw the line between where you are now and where you could ultimately be. Because at the heart of every great athlete is the unerring belief in the truth that was written on that dusty old sign in the corner of that football changing room:

"IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF THE DOG IN THE FIGHT THAT COUNTS, IT'S THE SIZE OF THE FIGHT IN THE DOG"