A Summary of:
**Psychosocial Characteristics of Olympic Track and Field Athletes**

This study gives the characteristics of 15 successful Olympic track and field athletes (9 males, 6 females). Interviews were conducted with each athlete to explore their dreams, developmental influences, performance and developmental obstacles, mental preparation, mental and physical qualities, and advice to young athletes...

Peak Performance Profiles...
What characteristics lead to top performances for track and field athletes?
What attitudes are necessary to succeed in track & field at the highest competitive level?

Athletes participated in 1+ of the 1984-1996 Olympics and volunteered to be in the study. At the time of the study, the athletes were at the 1993 U. S. Outdoor National Track and field Championships at Eugene, OR. Athletes were interviewed on the last day of competition after the meet. Participants included an athlete who holds two world records, four Olympic medalists (1 gold, 2 silver, 1 bronze), three American record holders, and 7 past or present US national track and field champions.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. **DREAMS:** When did you first start dreaming about being an Olympian?
2. **DEVELOPMENT:** What were some of the most important factors in your development as an athlete?
3. **OBSTACLES:** What are some of the obstacles you have had to overcome in your development? How did you do it?
4. **MENTAL PREPARATION:** How do you mentally prepare yourself for major competitions?
5. **MENTAL AND PHYSICAL QUALITIES:** What mental or physical qualities do you think have been the most important in your development?
6. **ADVICE TO YOUNG ATHLETES:** What words of advice would you give to young, future Olympians?
SUMMARY:

1. IMPORTANT MENTAL SKILLS AND ATTITUDES
   a. Most used skill was imagery or visualization to:
      i. anticipate tactics of other competitors
      ii. review performance (physical skills)
      iii. facilitate relaxation (mental and physical)
      iv. visualize winning and success
      v. increase confidence
      vi. supplement goal setting
      vii. develop kinesthetic and emotional feel for performances
      viii. use mental images to help performances
      ix. reduce stress
      x. help with concentration and focus.
   b. Ability to have fun and enjoy track and field. A passion for excellence.
   c. Patience was important → helped with necessary will power to develop naturally and to deal with frustrations or obstacles (injury or illness, training plateaus, legal issues).
   d. Perseverance and persistence were very important for success.
   e. Overcoming self-doubt and being confident was important (trust and belief in physical preparation helped develop mental confidence)
   f. Dreams (goals or visions) were important to help direct effort.

2. DEVELOPMENTAL CONCERNS:
   a. Although some felt beginning their track participation early was the key to their success, others didn’t really begin to commit themselves to track and field until late in high school (usually to get a scholarship).
   b. Importance of gradual progression in training workload (volume and intensity); gave a good base to improve performance and rehabilitate if injured.
   c. Overcoming injuries was a key factor. Avoid overtraining or overcompetition.
   d. Guidance from coaches was important (design and implementation of training, advice, influential relationship).

3. SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS
   a. Support systems were important (immediate family → parents and spouses)
   b. Nurturing settings without excess pressure to succeed were important.
   c. Spirituality, religion, or prayer was very important for 6 of the athletes (helped them remain faithful to goals and beliefs regarding their abilities and competencies; helped provide a deeper meaning to their athletic successes, failures, struggles, or disappointments).

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