



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.

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.



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

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!

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"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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