



Running for Gold

Every four years, the world seems to stop and focus in on sport. 16 days of the elitist of the elite: running, jumping, swimming and throwing with hopes that they will become Olympic champions. Years of training, hard work and sacrifice are devoted for the chance of Olympic glory. Everything in these athletes' lives revolves around their sport, and making it at the Olympics. Take for example the Australian men's and women's 470 class sailing teams.

"For almost a year, gold medal winning men's 470 sailors Nathan Wilmot and Malcolm Page, and women's 470 victors Tessa Parkinson and Elise Rechichi, pushed themselves to breaking point. A piece of toast for breakfast, a bowl of salad for lunch, all in a desperate attempt to strip weight and combat the weak winds of Qingdao. . . Surrounded by a smorgasbord of more than 70 different flavours at the Shangri La Hotel, the gold medal winning foursome – joined by their family and friends – began making up for more than 300 days of eating sacrifice.¹"

Lives are put on hold. Every meal carefully balanced, every step measured, every movement monitored. All this sacrifice for the chance of Olympic gold. Just the chance - the chance that if everything goes right, you'll make it to the Olympics. Then, if you don't mess up in the heats, or the semi-finals, or the final, if everything goes right on the day, then you might win gold. But you might not. You can put yourself in the best possible position, you can do everything right, but anything can happen on the day! It depends on all the other racers, on your equipment, on a million and one things that you can't control. We saw this with the Aussie men's rowing 8's, when the rudder of their boat broke after 600m. No one could have spotted it, no one knew about the problem, and once it happened, they were powerless. Fortunately the men's 8's lived on to have another attempt at making the final, but as 6 time Olympian James Tompkins said, anything can happen.

"All the athletes ... you put your life on hold and it's for a particular performance and obviously you want to go as well as you possibly can .. and we didn't get to that, which is really, really disappointing. You put yourself right on the knife's edge every time you go and compete at a World Championship or an Olympic Games and it can go either way. You put yourself on that edge and you sort of love it, but you sort of hate it as well. It's a really daunting thing, not only the competition but knowing you're going to have to smash yourself every time you get on the starting line. I'm pretty emotional before and after a race, win, lose or draw. I get really wound up because it means a lot.²"

It's high pressure, it means everything to these athletes. If you give up your life in the pursuit of something, and it doesn't happen, it's devastating. Fabrice Lapierre is an Aussie long jumper who missed out on competing in the final. He was millimetres between making all his hard work pay off, all those years of sacrifice and hardship, and heartbreak.

" Watching the final and seeing the guys out there I had completed against and done as well as or better, and knowing that I could have changed my life right there and then I've got to wait, it's hard to deal with. . .My whole life could have changed. All it took was a few millimetres.³"

¹ Sydney Morning Herald 20/08/2008.

² Courtesy of <http://au.sports.yahoo.com/olympics/news/article/-/4925384/tompkins-feels-fit-rowing>. Accessed 19/8/08

³ Sydney Morning Herald 20/08/2008



So what about us as Christians? Frequently in the Bible Paul talks about the Christian life as if we were running a race. It's all the action words - we are to be **striving** to be godly, **fleeing** from sin, pressing on. We too are athletes running towards a goal, a prize, a medal.

“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.⁴”

Pressing on to obtain the prize. The gold medal. But our gold medal has already been won! Our gold medal has already been secured for us by Jesus. His death and resurrection have won the victory over sin for us. His victory is our victory. We race knowing we have already won.

And just as the Olympic athletes sacrifice so much in their lives for their race, shouldn't we too be making sacrifices for our race? Athletes in preparation for the Olympics will get up early every morning to train, or go to bed early rather than staying out late. They are careful with every area of their lives, for the chance at winning a medal. Shouldn't we too be sacrificing every area of our life? And all the more, because our prize, our gold medal is even better than an Olympic gold!

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. *They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*⁵”

Our prize, our medal will not fade into obscurity, it is eternal. We will not miss out, nothing can go wrong, we will not be disappointed. For our gold medal is assured, won with the blood of Jesus Christ.

-Rosie Da Costa
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⁴ Philippians 3:13-14.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27