

It's passion for their sport that keeps the greatest driving on to achieve even more

FAITH IN SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

Passion is the fuel that keeps top sports personalities keeping on. "Passion first and everything will fall into place," said Holly Holm, an American mixed martial artist, who competes in the Ultimate Fighting Championship. She is the former UFC Women's Bantamweight Champion, and a former professional boxer and kickboxer.

"Courage, sacrifice, determination, commitment, toughness, heart, talent, guts. That's what little girls are made of; the heck with sugar and spice," sighed Bethany Hamilton, an American professional surfer and writer who – aged just 13 – survived a 2003 shark attack in which her left arm was bitten off but who, as soon as the arm stopped bleeding, returned to professional surfing.

She wrote about her experience in the 2004 autobiography *Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family, and Fighting to Get Back on the Board*, which was adapted into the 2011 feature film *Soul Surfer*, in which she attributes her strength to her Christian faith.

"No matter the circumstances that

you may be going through, just push through it," urged Ray Lewis, American former professional football player who played as a middle linebacker with the Baltimore Ravens for his entire 17-year career in the National Football League (NFL).

"You've got to be confident when you're competing. You've got to be a beast," declared Gabby Douglas, a member of the gold-winning teams at both the 2012 and the 2016 Summer Olympics, dubbed the 'Fierce Five' and the 'Final Five' by the media, respectively. She was also a member of the gold-winning American teams at the 2011 and the 2015 World Championships.

Douglas is the first African American to become the Olympic individual all-around champion, and the first US gymnast to win gold in both the individual all-around and team competitions at the same Olympics. She was also the 2016 AT&T American Cup all-around champion.

As a public figure, Douglas' gymnastics successes have led to her life story adaptation in the 2014 Lifetime biopic film, *The Gabby Douglas Story*, as well as the acquisition of her own reality television series, *Douglas Family Gold*. Douglas has also written a book about her life and what it takes to be an Olympic gold medallist by

determination and perseverance.

From tiny beginnings – when a person has passion – great things can be born. Take Oisin Murphy, a premature baby, who weighed just 2 lb 14 oz (1.3 kg) at birth. He started riding aged four and got his own pony, Rusty, when he was seven. When he was 14, the family moved to Buttevant, County Cork, so that Murphy could ride under the tutelage of his uncle Jim Culloty, three-time Cheltenham Gold Cup winner and Grand National winner.

Having sat on a racehorse for the first time at the age of 14, Murphy abandoned his earlier ambition to be a show-jumper and embarked on the pony-racing circuit. When he was 15, he spent the summer at Tommy Stack's yard in County Tipperary and the following summer worked at Ballydoyle. In October 2012, at the age of 17, he moved to England and joined Andrew Balding's yard at Kingsclere in Berkshire. He became the British flat racing Champion Apprentice in 2014, and the British flat racing champion jockey in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

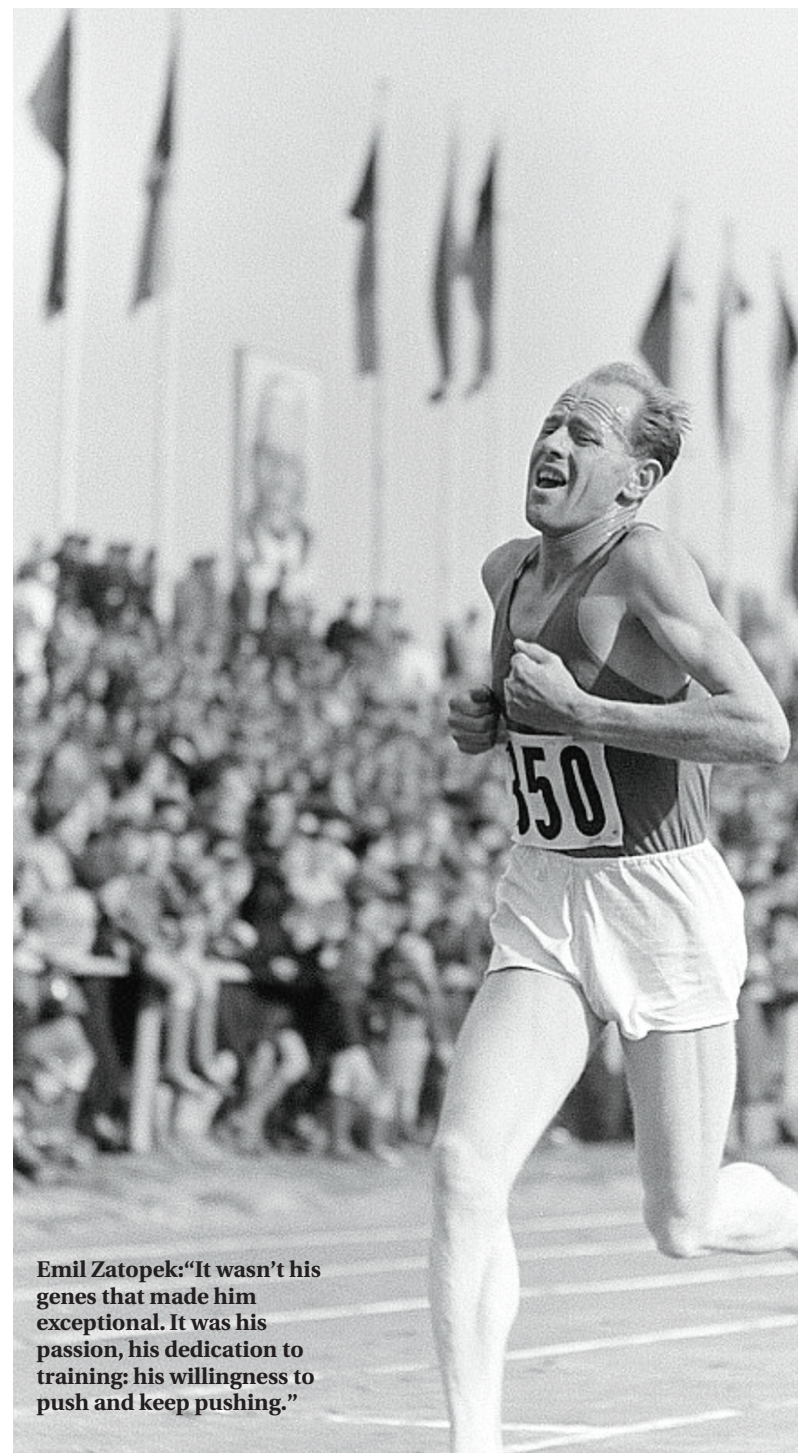
One of my childhood heroes was Emil Zatopek. He helped shape the philosophy of my own life. In his 1950s prime, he was a global megastar. It wasn't just the five Olympic medals and the 18 world records. It was the way he ran. Undeclared at 10,000m for six years, he dominated and revolutionised his sport. His three-gold clean sweep of Olympic distance-running events at Helsinki in 1952 (including a debut marathon) is unlikely ever to be matched.

Zatopek's self-developed system of high-volume interval training – first ridiculed, then widely imitated – transformed the way that elite distance runners train.

Then there was his personality: witty, charming, kind. Fans liked his visibly agonised running style, which made him supremely dramatic to watch. Rivals loved him for his humour and sportsmanship. He transcended sport. He was the Muhammad Ali of his day.

Zatopek's resting pulse-rate was in the mid-fifties; his blood pressure, when he started out on his career,

Left, Bethany Hamilton, who lost her left arm after a shark attack. "Courage, sacrifice, determination, commitment, toughness, heart, talent, guts. That's what little girls are made of; the heck with sugar and spice..."



Emil Zatopek: "It wasn't his genes that made him exceptional. It was his passion, his dedication to training; his willingness to push and keep pushing."

was relatively high. In short, he was (relatively) normal. So, it wasn't his genes that made him exceptional. It was his passion, his dedication to training; his willingness to push and keep pushing.

In circumstance as well as genetics, he was not born with a head start. In contrast to the privileged types who had hitherto dominated Olympic competition, Zatopek was born in poverty. He raised himself to greatness through sheer hard work. In the words of the great Australian coach Percy Cerutti, 'He earned, and won for himself, every inch of a very hard road.'

Zatopek believed in this mantra: "What a man wants, he can achieve." All it took was effort, persistence and a cheerful indifference to discomfort. "Pain is a merciful thing," he explained. "If it lasts without interruption, it dulls itself."

If you want to amount to anything as a runner, it's worth taking that thought on board – along with another piece of Zatopekian wisdom: "One's willpower increases with each task fulfilled."

Emil didn't, as is sometimes claimed, invent interval training. But he used it to transform his sport.

Convinced that the secret of running was to learn to run fast ("I already know how to run slow"), he developed a rigorous system of fast repetitions with short, ruthlessly limited recovery jogs. A typical Zatopek workout was 5x200 metre sprints followed by 20x400 and 5x200 with 200m jogs in between.

Over the years, Zatopek increased his training load to include more and more repetitions getting up to 20x200, 40x400, 20x200 with 200 jogs for a workout. The basis of his programme was to develop what he called "speed and stamina."

Emil helped shape the thinking behind The John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport (JP2F4S) charity. This focused on character development through sport by means of our AVP – "Aim High For All" Virtues Programme - using elite sports personalities as role models.

In life, we all have our 3Bs: our Belonging influencing our Believing that, in turn, shapes our Behavior; our ethics. Virtues make values visible. Virtues enable us to grow. They engender a proclivity to creative choices, social harmony. Peace. I am on earth to learn to live to love – in all six sequences of those three verbs. That is my passion.

