

# Learning from the Olympics



Danka Bartekova was an Olympic medalist in the sport of skeet shooting.  
[Photo: Danka Bartekova Facebook]

*The Olympics brings together the best athletes on earth. OMAR CHAUDHURI asks what lessons we can gather from them.*

“I was preparing for it for two years. After the competition, I felt huge satisfaction because the work paid off. I remember millions of messages and emails that I got that day. It was a great experience, and the ceremony, when I got the medal — nothing is like that.”

Danka Bartekova said these words, speaking to the Olympic.org website. She won a bronze medal in a little-known event called “skeet shooting” at the London 2012 Games. Even though she is not famous because of her achievement, she is very proud of how she got there.

This is because Bartekova knows it is not easy being an Olympian. There are many things we can learn from athletes like her. Even though their success is at one of the biggest events in the world, we can take inspiration from their attitude. You can even apply it to some of the things you do, like taking an exam, or singing in a concert.

## **Lesson 1: Hard work is necessary**

The athlete who has won the most Olympic medals in history is Michael Phelps. Clearly, this does not happen overnight. Phelps’

training programme is famous for how difficult it is. At his peak, Phelps swam 80,000 metres per week. In total, he would train for around six hours per day, six days per week. He uses underwater headphones so he doesn't get bored and to remain focused.

Phelps can also eat more than most of us. Most men will eat around 2,500 calories per day. When training, Phelps eats up to 12,000 calories! This is because he needs lots of energy to keep up with all that swimming.

Phelps knows that while talent is important, all his competitors will be training hard to catch up with him. Just as he wants to be the best swimmer he can be, you might want to be the best actor, dancer or writer. This will always require hard work.



Mo Farah after his 2012 Olympics triumph. [Photo: Al King]

## **Lesson 2: Sacrifice is hard**

Winning an Olympic medal is a fantastic feeling, but it also requires some hardship. Athletes need to train for long hours and are often away from their families.

For example, the British long-distance runner Mo Farah trains in Kenya, which means he does not see his young children for months. In 2014, he told reporters, “My kids have grown so much in the last few months. In the back of my head, I'm thinking, ‘They might not recognise you’. I wish I could just sit in my house and do stuff with them, but I wouldn't have achieved what I have. I guess it takes sacrifice to be a champion.”

Farah's sacrifices have been worth it. He won two gold medals at the London 2012 Games and is considered to be one of the greatest long-distance runners in history. Although we rarely need to make such painful sacrifices, the ones we do make can be helpful. You may

have, at some time, needed to stay at home to study for an exam, rather than seeing friends, for example.

### Lesson 3: Listen to good advice

“Following good advice has been **crucial** to my success,” Chris Hoy told the Mail Online in 2010. “There will always be people with a negative attitude saying, 'He'll never make it'. It is hugely important to listen to people with experience, but it can be **detrimental** to listen to those who don't believe in you like you believe in yourself.”

Hoy clearly avoided bad advice throughout his career. No cyclist has won more medals than Hoy. Even though he was very talented, he recognised that there were people with more experience than himself. These people could tell him stories of how they handled different situations. Hoy could learn from these stories, and maybe even avoid the mistakes these people made.

Like Hoy, we also need to be careful to choose whom we listen to. We need to decide if the person is trying to help us or not.

### Lesson 4: Take advantage of luck

For all the hard work an athlete puts in, he or she always needs a bit of luck. In 2008, Singapore's Feng Tianwei needed to beat South Korea's Park Miyoung to take her country to the women's team table tennis final. At 7-7 in the fourth game, Park had a fantastic opportunity to win the point. If she did, she would put Feng under a lot of pressure. However, she missed a simple smash. A few minutes later, Feng reached the 11 points she needed to win the match.

On most days, Park would have won that point, no matter what Feng did. However, Feng got a bit of luck. As a result, Singapore were soon guaranteed of their first Olympic medal in 48 years. We all know when we've gotten some good luck — the key is making sure we take advantage of it.

At first glance, Olympians seem nothing like you or me. However, when we look closer, we can see that their approach to winning medals can teach us many lessons about how we can approach our own day-to-day lives.

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#### VOCAB BUILDER

**crucial** (say “**kru**-shel”; adjective) = extremely important.

**detrimental** (say “**det**-ri-men-tul”; adjective) = causing damage; making things worse.