

THE ATHLETE'S WAY *PRESCRIPTIVE FOR A TONIC LEVEL OF FITNESS*

- *Twenty to forty-five minutes of cardio most days*
- *Full-body strength training two to three times a week (twenty to forty minutes)*
- *Stretch-balance three to five times a week (ten to fifteen minutes)*
- *Sleep for seven to eight hours a night*

This adds up to a minimum weekly time commitment of three hours of exercise. There are 168 hours in a week. Just three hours of exercise per week will radically change the other 165 hours of your life. Think about it. That's about 2 percent of your week to feel better the other 98 percent of the time. It's an unbeatable ratio. With just three cumulative hours of exercise a week you feel better, look better, and sleep better. The return on investment is astronomical. Our biological design was generous; relatively little exercise reaps an exponentially huge payback.

*SWEAT AND THE BIOLOGY OF BLISS
LIKE A SUNNY DAY IN JUNE*

No one has ever drowned in sweat.

LOU HOLTZ

I came up with the title *The Athlete's Way: Sweat and the Biology of Bliss* on a summer afternoon as I was biking in Central Park. If you spend a lot of time in Central Park, you get to recognize the regulars. You see the same faces every day. This June day felt like the first day of summer—everyone was exuding so much energy and a love of life . . . walking, biking, running, in-line skating, skateboarding, horseback riding. I felt that I was with old friends, even though we were technically strangers. The enthusiasm was contagious, and we were all feeding off one another's happiness.

In looking for the X-factor that connected us, I realized that how fast or slow people were going, or if they were particularly svelte or graceful, didn't matter. What mattered was that we were all in the park for the same reason . . . it made us feel good. We were all there because we loved to move, and sport was a chance to feel the excitement of forward movement. None

MY STORY

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of us were standing still in life. I decided that X-factor was summed up in the words *The Athlete's Way*—we were all doing it our own way, but collectively it could be called the athlete's way. The key to being an athlete was that athletes seek exercise.

I was a link in this chain. I felt connected because I was sweating, too. I know it sounds simple, but it was an epiphany for me at the time. I still look for the athlete's way in people I observe every day on stationary equipment or whizzing by outside. Often, it is the ethereal bursting out of human spirit in a movement that captures the athlete's way. The move of a wrist or hip, the angle of the eyes, the rhythm and grace. I suggest you look for this effervescent X-factor of *the athlete's way* in people you see exercising, or doing anything well. Tag it, and extract the traits that go into the fluidity of their performance so you can imitate it. Feed off others and embrace the solidarity you feel in doing so. Know that others will borrow the same from you when you are exuding this fluidity, too. You become a link in this chain.

The light was perfect that day in Central Park. I looked around and all that caught my eye was this very specific quality of Manhattan summer light reflecting off different shades of skin. To be with these fellow New Yorkers, pushing against our own limits, together against the deep green trees, clear blue skies, and huge skyscrapers to the south was Utopia. The Manhattan skyline and the energy of human possibility collided, as they often do on the roadways and bridle paths of the park.

I came up with the subtitle after doing a few more laps in the park. I was coming down the West Side from the reservoir toward Tavern on the Green, which is mostly downhill, and I was flying. I looked down and saw the sun beaming back at me from the beads of sweat on my own shoulder. I lifted my wrist to my nose and smelled the Coppertone mixed with the chlorine of my swim earlier that day, the delicious smell harbored in my watch wristband of the musk of a year's worth of sweaty workouts, and thought, *that is the essence of sport to me*. Sweat is the common denominator in every workout and every athlete. It is egalitarian. Sweat creates an unspoken bond among all athletes. We get on to the same wavelength.

I always felt free when I ran. I suppose that's what was good about it.

BETTY CUTHBERT (OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST)

In soaking in the rapture of sport, I am always reminded of Joseph Campbell, who said, "Follow your bliss," and who often refers to the Sanskrit word *ananda*, which means bliss or rapture. *Ananda* is the root used to

name *anandamide*, the endocannabinoid released during exercise, linked now to runner's high more than endorphin. Anandamide is called "The Bliss Molecule" by neuroscientists and is the key to feeling good when we sweat.

I was biking along, and suddenly the idea of sweat and anandamide came together into the words *sweat and the biology of bliss*. It is very basic, but summed up the impetus for my motivation to get a glow on every day and has been a mantra for me ever since. These words reflect my message, too. Sweat on the outside represented anandamide and other brain chemicals pumping on the inside. It was a eureka moment. Sweat=Bliss. The universality of that equation became the foundation of this program. I have never looked at a sweaty person the same way after that day. All I picture now when I see people sweat is the joie de vivre radiating from them in the form of neurochemicals pumping inside their brains symbolized by sweat streaming from their skin.

Sweat and the biology of bliss are human experiences accessible to everyone. The same anandamide, serotonin, and dopamine that flow through you flow through me, too. Anybody can experience this bliss through sweat. My advice is to chase your bliss by breaking a sweat every day. Don't just follow your bliss; reach out and grab it. Chase it down. It's at your fingertips . . . just a few heartbeats, deep breaths, and paces away. Anytime you want bliss, you can come and get it by breaking a sweat.

ONE ATHLETE'S WAY MY LIFE TAKING SHAPE

Some people create with words or with music or with a brush and paints. I like to make something beautiful when I run. I like to make people stop and say, "I've never seen anyone run like that before." It's more than just a race, it's a style. It's doing something better than anyone else. It's being creative.

STEVE PREFONTAINE (AMERICAN LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING LEGEND)

I started running when I was seventeen and never stopped. It was the summer of 1983. At first I was running away from many things—dysphoria, substance abuse, my parents' divorce, and typical teenage angst. If I was running toward anything, it was the hope of changing my looks. I was initially driven by a teenage mix of despair and vanity, but running became my