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OCTOBER 2006

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details inside

LOCAL FLAVOR

Chef and Entrepreneur Sarig Agasi qualified for Boston the hard way - at Grandfather Mountain. See how he leverages his endurance lifestyle to succeed in business and in life.

The Connection

between
SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS
and **ENDURANCE ATHLETES**

BY GRACE W. UENG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAMARA LACKEY

“Champions aren’t made in the gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside of them — a desire, a dream, a vision. They have last-minute stamina, they have to be a little faster, they have to have the skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill.” —MUHAMMAD ALI

Think back to statistics class and the concept of the correlation coefficient, and let’s explore the R^2 between successful entrepreneurs and successful endurance athletes. Statistics show that the odds are against accomplishing “success” in either if “success” is measured by generating millions in an IPO or being a top finisher at Kona. I had the chance to interview entrepreneurs who are very successful in their entrepreneurial pursuits, and when you layer on their endurance accomplishments, we would all agree they are simply amazing.

While we cannot conclude there is a scientific causal relationship between successful entrepreneurs and endurance athletes, similar characteristics are embodied in both classes of individuals: discipline, extreme drive, and vision. “Successful entrepreneurs and athletes must have a vision—and the dedication and drive to make that vision a reality,” comments Ryan Wuerch, chairman and CEO of Motricity. “As an entrepreneur and an athlete, you face challenges and a level of intensity that sometimes seem too great to overcome, but in both cases, you push through.” Bud Whitmeyer, general partner of Research Triangle Ventures, agrees, “Both classes of individuals need to have the ‘stick it out’ mentality.” Chef Sarig Agasi knows the recipe—he takes his time in the kitchen at Zely & Ritz, named by Organic Style as one of the top 20 organic restaurants in America, but not on the road. His best inventions, including special athlete menus, come to mind while training to break 3:00 in the next Boston Marathon.

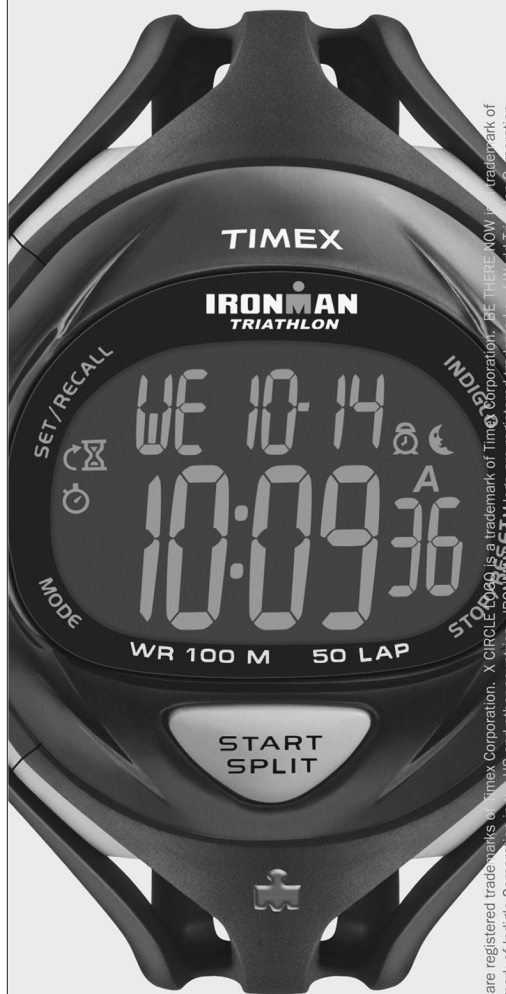
Donna Jensen, the former CEO of Startups.com in the Bay Area who now runs Vibrant Ventures in Chapel Hill, believes the correlation between entrepreneurship and endurance sports is “a good, healthy supply of endorphins . . . the most successful entrepreneurs have high-endurance levels and tremendous stamina, probably due to the powerful

From left: David Motsinger (CTO, Strikelron), Grace Ueng (Founder & CEO, Savvy Marketing Group), Henry Kaestner (Cofounder and CEO, Bandwidth.com), Ryan Wuerch (Chairman and CEO, Motricity), Keith Boswell (VP of Marketing, rPath), Donna Jensen-Madier (Founding Principal, Vibrant Ventures), Sarig Agasi (Chef/Owner, Zely & Ritz Restaurant)

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effect of endorphins.” (She adds that she does not know of any entrepreneurs on steroids.) Jensen always loved to run, and when she shut down Startups.com in 2002, she signed up for her first marathon and “discovered that euphoric feeling again at about mile 10 and was hooked.” She found that she was not alone. “While training, I came across numerous other dot-com CEO casualties who were also training for a marathon or triathlon. We laughed it off saying it was better than hitting the booze, but I think we all knew that we missed the energy and excitement of it all.” Endurance sports are a perfect fit for entrepreneurs between ventures. This rang true for me—in 2001, after I completed my one-year cross-country tour of duty integrating OpenSite Technologies here in Durham with Siebel Systems out in San Mateo, I started to train for my first marathon with Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training, and now I am a trustee and board member for the society, whose mission is to eradicate blood-related cancers.

Austin entrepreneur Kevin Przybocki, cofounder of Anue Systems, describes his motivation, one common to entrepreneurs: “It’s not for the fame, money or health benefits. There are plenty of other ways to make money and to get in shape. For these activities, it has more to do with challenging oneself, reaching goals, and achieving things that are personally satisfying. In both cases, it is a way of life, and a mindset, rather than an event. It’s in your blood to be an entrepreneur or an endurance athlete.” David Motsinger, CTO of Strikelron, describes his entrepreneurial goals as focused first not on money but on the mission “to succeed in creating value that helps others, helps myself and allows me to learn something new. If in the process I can score a financial win, then that is good, too.” Pete Durand, CEO of Integrian, echoes Przybocki’s in-the-blood sentiment when he states his entrepreneurial goal: “Build a great company, have a successful exit, do it again.” All the entrepreneurial athletes I interviewed, just like me, don’t stop—we are all Energizer bunnies.

Bryan Bergeron, president of Archetype Technologies, who serves on the medical advisory board of Cary startup Virtual Heroes and on the faculty of the Harvard-MIT Health Sciences Technology program, adds this important note: “Endurance sports require the ability to work alone as well as within a group.” Teamwork certainly is critical at successful ventures, and where would Lance be without the strategic peloton draft of the Discovery Channel Team? Cohesion of teammates can make or break a successful finish.

Individually, entrepreneurial startups and endurance sports each take a large investment of time. Together, does one get hurt by the other? Asked if endurance pursuits hinder or promote his entrepreneurial endeavors, Ryan Wuerch comments, “My physical training has positively influenced my entrepreneurial endeavors by creating in me a confidence, energy, and discipline far stronger than what they were before I began training.” Several entrepreneurs mention what Whitmeyer believes—that he has “less downtime due to illness” and is more productive. Przybocki believes that his endurance pursuits motivate his staff—when he started riding his bike to work, it encouraged other

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— RYAN WUERCH, CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF MOTRICITY.

people to ride as well (for commuting or otherwise), creating a healthier workplace. Wuerch is leading several athletes from his company to form Team Motricity for the L.A. Triathlon—just a few days before one of their industry’s largest trade shows, to be held in L.A. “I think that the excitement and camaraderie generated by the triathlon will be a great start for the show,” he says. While endurance pursuits certainly demand time away from entrepreneurial endeavors, Bergeron believes there is a symbiotic momentum effect between the two that more than makes up for the time spent training and therefore makes him more effective and efficient overall.

Henry Kaestner, cofounder and CEO of Bandwidth.com, whose cofounder, chairman, and president, David Morken, competed in Kona last year, states for him there is just the right balance: “While I’m fortunate to work and train with a phenomenal endurance athlete, I’m not at the level where work would hold back my ambitions for megastardom. I just don’t have that opportunity and therefore I don’t have that tension. I find that a long bike ride can release pent-up stress that comes with being the final point of escalation for business challenges.”

What are the endurance pursuits of these star entrepreneurs? Whitmeyer enjoys masters cycling competition and will participate in the Hilly Hellacious Hundred in Asheville. In addition to several triathlons, Wuerch plans on running the New York City Marathon and has set a goal to participate in an Ironman in 2008. Durand builds endurance through long bike races of 125 miles. Keith Boswell, vice president of Marketing at rPath, has included his family, down to his seven-year-old, who has his first kids triathlon at UNC. This makes his time management easier because he can train for triathlons with his wife and kids. Boswell is aiming for the Pinehurst Olympic Triathlon, Inside Out Sports’ half marathon this fall, and the White Lake Half Ironman in May 2007. Kaestner states, “I have some unfinished business left at the Blood, Sweat, and Gears Century . . . illusions of grandeur caused me to be near the front of the ride during the first part, only to bonk significantly after only 20 miles. I’d like to improve next time.” Morken had on his 2006 plate Assault on Mt. Mitchell (100 miles and several thousand feet of climbing), the Duke Liver Center Half Ironman, and the Blue Ridge Brutal (another 100+ mile suffer-fest with about 14,000 feet of climbing). He states, “I actually enjoy the high intensity and duration of these sports, and one of the benefits is

higher energy and efficiency at work.”

Interesting training for busy business travelers includes Bergeron's running of stairs every other day for 90 minutes—"All you need is an iPod and a stairwell in a high-rise." He adds that this is great training for the Double Dipsea adventure race in Sausalito.

How long do these entrepreneurs hope to pursue endurance sports, and which pursuit will last longer? Bergeron praises a 90-year-old former Boston Marathoner, whom he sees on his step run in Boston: "He doesn't run the steps anymore, but he carries a backpack filled with weights... I hope to follow in his footsteps." (I think he means literally!) While some think their bodies will give out before their brains and others hope to pursue their endurance activities even more frequently when their entrepreneurial streaks end, still others are like Wuerch, who says, "I plan on being active and being an entrepreneur the rest of my life." Agasi, who started racing in marathons when he turned 41, recounts, "My mom had just been diagnosed with cancer, and that made me decide I needed to change my lifestyle to not only cook and eat healthy but also to start acting and being healthy... I was literally running for my life." Morken, who started his first company in middle school and started triathlons while in the United States Marine Corps a decade ago, states precisely, "I expect both pursuits to die with me simultaneously." Not a surprising response from the first overall finisher from North Carolina in the 2005 Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii.

There you have it—the spirited drive in entrepreneurs who attack endurance sports with passion. From this snapshot of successful entrepreneurs and strong endurance athletes, I would say there is a definite correlation between the two drives. I commend you and wish you all the best in both your ventures and races!

If you would like to add your stories about your entrepreneurial pursuits and endurance endeavors, we would love to hear from you—just log on to endurancemag.com.

Grace W. Ueng is founder and CEO of Savvy Marketing Group (www.savvymarketinggroup.com), a leading strategic consulting firm, and she is an adjunct professor at the UNC Kenan-Flagler business school. A trustee for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Ueng began her endurance career through Team in Training, running her first marathon in honor of a friend diagnosed with a rare form of lymphoma. She went on to enjoy triathlons and will participate in aquathlons in 2007. With the addition of new ventures in China to her company's service offerings, she looks forward to the Great Wall Marathon coinciding with the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

“...it is a way of life, and a mindset, rather than an event. It's in your blood to be an entrepreneur or an endurance athlete.” —DAVID MOTSINGER, CTO OF STRIKEIRON

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