

**What is an “elite athlete”?****Do you have to “be a natural” to be an elite athlete?****What other qualities do I need to be an elite athlete?**

All good questions ! Let's take them one at a time.

An elite athlete is many things dependent upon the level he has achieved. The good news is, he can be an elite athlete and still grow to be even better...*more elite*. The term “elite athlete” is not a constant state. “Elite” , being a relative term, could apply to an individual who is at the top of his sport within the realm in which he competes: Local, State, National, Olympic or World Cup. Each level has its own ceiling and, once he has broken one ceiling, the challenge is to break the next. Are you an elite athlete within your realm? Do you push yourself to the next level? What are your goals? How “elite” do you want to be? But as a technical term, as used by most coaches in a particular sport, this term usually applies to the very best.

Some people are told : “you are just a natural”. What does that mean? Does that individual have some athleticism that is effortless on his part? He may possess eye-hand coordination, quick reflexes, strength or stamina that makes his first attempt at a sport fairly successful. But is this something that is necessary to become an elite athlete? Research says NO.

It is widely debated: natural ability vs hard work... which produces? These questions are asked in all realms of life, not just sports. 'In 2006, a team of British researchers concluded that “there is no evidence to support that excelling is a consequence of possessing innate gifts.” ' (Anonymous, 2010) We see around us that all talented people do not rise to the top and succeed, but some do. Why is that? Naturally talented or otherwise, the answers lie in the answers to our third question.

How many times have you been told that success means hard work. Well.....I can't argue against that ! Hard work includes study of the sport: the biomechanics, how to adapt to any situation you might face, mental training, deliberate practices, quality training, challenges and many other things.

Hard work works better for some than others. This is because of their *attitude!* This individual usually HATES to lose...at anything. He is ferocious, tenacious, committed, conditions mean nothing, and performance means everything.

I think of Tiger Woods, who has all of those qualities. He is a great golfer and I wanted to know WHY he was different and better than other golfers...even though I don't golf. His approach is well thought out. Although Tiger can hit the ball 360+ yards from the T, he seldom does. He hits the ball within the range he has already determined will be his next shot that will put him, not only on the green, but near the hole. The key to his game is his second stroke. There is an old axiom in golf: “If you want a lower score, place the ball closer to the hole.” And that is exactly what Tiger does with his second shot. He puts the ball inside of 15 feet whereas most golfers rarely do. This makes his putt-in an easy putt and shaves 2 points off a par 5.

But even with hard work, you do not “arrive” in a day. Even with practice, attitude and ability, there is no substitute for experience. That means getting in the game. For the marksman, he doesn't know what he has inside until he steps to the firing line. Then he must take responsibility for every shot.....no excuses. The pressure to perform is on. Can you rise to the occasion? Will you fall apart if the conditions are not just right or what you expected? Can you handle your nerves and still perform? Can you produce when you don't have you “A” game going for you? “There is zero evidence of elite performance without the practice or experience to support such success.” (Anonymous, 2010)

“A desire to win requires the time and effort on the range in the form of deliberate practice, time in the gym to improve strength and conditioning, ongoing discussions with a sports psychologist (or coach) and most important..A *WILL TO WIN*”

“At the end of your career, if you are known for something, let it be your commitment to the sport and unprecedented work ethic, not for being a natural.” (Anonymous, 2010)

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Anonymous. (2010, Sept-Oct). The Natural. *US A Shooting* , 19 (5), p. 14.