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## Defeating all psychological barriers: The magnificent success stories of two Indian girls

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### Abstract

Mental obstacles refer to any psychological or emotional issue that interferes with your ability to perform your best consistently in the biggest competitions of your life. All of the mental tools in the world that you use in practice and competitions won't help you achieve your athletic goals if you don't have the attitudes in place that prepare you for success and you have removed the obstacles that set you up for failure. It's one thing to have the capabilities to move forward, physically, technically, tactically, and mentally. It's an entirely different thing to have psychological and emotional anchors that weigh you down and keep you from moving forward with confidence and determination. Fear of failure is the most common and most harmful of the obstacles with athletes. The reality is that failure isn't worth fearing; the most successful people in all walks of life fail frequently and monumentally on the way to success. The fear of failure comes from the meaning that you attach to failure. Young people get this fear of failure from their parents and from our hyper-achievement culture in which being labelled a failure is worse than death. This fear can become so great that you become more focused on avoiding failure than pursuing success. Overcoming such obstacles is considered a great success for any sportsman. This paper focuses on how two athletes, Marry Kom and Hima Das achieved success defeating their barriers in path of success.

**Keywords:** Psychological barrier, emotional issues, fear of failure

### Introduction

Mental obstacles refer to any psychological or emotional issue that interferes with your ability to perform your best consistently in the biggest competitions of your life. All of the mental tools in the world that you use in practice and competitions won't help you achieve your athletic goals if you don't have the attitudes in place that prepare you for success and you have removed the obstacles that set you up for failure. It's one thing to have the capabilities to move forward, physically, technically, tactically, and mentally. It's an entirely different thing to have psychological and emotional anchors that weigh you down and keep you from moving forward with confidence and determination. Fear of failure is the most common and most harmful of the obstacles with athletes. The reality is that failure isn't worth fearing; the most successful people in all walks of life fail frequently and monumentally on the way to success. The fear of failure comes from the meaning that you attach to failure. Young people get this fear of failure from their parents and from our hyper-achievement culture in which being labelled a failure is worse than death. This fear can become so great that you become more focused on avoiding failure than pursuing success. In doing so, you become unwilling to take risks and even sabotage your efforts to succeed to protect you against the possibility of failure even when the chances of failure are small.

The only way to achieve success is to accept that you might fail and that's okay. Bode Miller, the Olympic skiing champion, exemplified this attitude because he never cared about failing. All he cared about was giving it everything he had and performing as fast as he could. If Bode did that, he was satisfied, regardless of his result. If you don't give it your all, you have zero chance of success. If you do, your chances aren't 100%, but they are far higher than zero. If you can let go of your fear of failure, you free yourself to throw yourself into your sport with reckless abandon. Expectations are a kiss of death in sport, in other words, if you enter a competition focused on expecting a certain result, you are pretty much assured of not getting that result.

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Expectations are so harmful because they put you in a mindset in which you have to meet your expectations because, well, it is expected of you. To not meet the expectation would be perceived as a major fail. Directly connected to fear of failure, expectations always conclude with a threat; for example, “I expect to win today”...or else. The “or else” may be: people will think I suck, I won’t be able to compete for a DI college, my dreams of being a pro will be over, or some other scenario that you think is equally catastrophic. The weight you place on fulfilling these expectations results in immense pressure which, in turn, produces doubt, worry, and anxiety, all of which will make meeting those expectations very unlikely.

Your goal is to let go of the necessity of expectations and embrace the possibility of goals. The goal of “I want to win” is much different than the expectation “I need to podium.” With the former, you naturally want to move toward your goal with determination and excitement; with the latter, you want to avoid the expectation like the plague. The four obstacles that have just described create a unsalable wall of negativity that basically ensures both failure and the complete absence of enjoyment in your sport. You have no confidence and are filled with doubt. You perform with a sense of impending doom. You experience tremendous anxiety and tension so you’re physically incapable of performing your best. You are your own worst enemy on game day. Your opponents want to be beat you on game day. If you are your own worst enemy, then you have no chance of performing your best and achieving your goals.

Our culture reveres perfectionists. On the surface, who wouldn’t want to be one? They hold themselves to incredibly high standards, drive themselves relentlessly in pursuit of perfection, and usually find quite a bit of success. Yet, there is a dark side to perfectionism that you may not be aware of. The goals they set for themselves are often unattainable, resulting in almost-guaranteed failure (at least in their own eyes). Perfectionists make their self-esteem dependent on how they perform and the results they produce. They berate themselves unmercifully for failing to live up to those unreachable goals. Perfectionists often fear failure more than they are want success. They are also unwilling to take reasonable risks because, by definition, they may lead to failure. Finally, I have never met a truly happy perfectionist because how can they be happy if they aren’t perfect (which, as human beings, is impossible).

My antidote to perfection is excellence which takes all of the good things that perfectionism has to offer, for example, excellence still sets the bar very high and excellence is attainable, but also rejects all the bad stuff related to perfectionism. Excellence allows for the mistakes and failure that inevitably occur in its pursuit. It also encourages risk taking because failure isn’t threatening and is actually relished because it means you are pushing yourself to your limits. Finally, excellence makes chasing your goals fun and exciting rather than anxiety provoking (thus leading to, rather than detracting from, happiness).

The removal of these obstacles is my priority because, with them in place, the chances of success are very low. Your goal is to shift from this position of weakness, grounded in overinvestment, perfectionism, fear of failure, expectations, and negativity, to one of strength that includes a healthy investment in your sport, the pursuit of excellence, striving for high goals, and having a positive attitude.

### **Success Story of Mary Kom**

Mary Kom was born in 1983 in a poor family in Kangathai,

Manipur. She is the first daughter of Shri M Tonpa Kom and Smt M Akham Kom. They belonged to Kangathel village, a small village in Churachandpur district in Manipur. Her parents, Mangte Tonpa Kom and Mangte Akham Kom, worked in jhum fields. Her family background speaks a lot of how Mary overcame hardship and inconveniences and created a name for herself in the arena of world boxing. She completed her primary education from Loktak Christian Model High School, Moirang till her class sixth standard and St. Xavier School, Moirang up to class VIII. She then moved to Adimjati High School, Imphal for her schooling for class IX and X, but could not pass her examination. She did not want to reappear for her exams so she quit her school and passed her examination from NIOS, Imphal and graduation from Churachandpur College. Being the eldest, Mary helped her parents work in the fields, cutting woods, making charcoal and fishing. On the other hand, she spent a good time looking after her two younger sisters and a brother. Mary Kom was interested in sports since her childhood. She took a keen interest in Athletics. when she was in class VI in Loktak Christian Mission School, Moirang and class VII- VIII in St. Xavier School, Moirang. Mary thought that she would become a good athlete one day and carve a name for herself in the discipline. But fate decided otherwise. She took to sports in an effort to provide some financial support to her family. “I was initially an all-round athlete, and 400-m and javelin were my pet events.

She began boxing in 2000 and was a quick learner who preferred to be put through the same paces as the boys around her. “In just two weeks, I had learnt all the basics. I guess I had God-given talent for boxing.” Mary had tried to hide her interest in boxing from her family, since it was not considered as a sport for them. Her father scolded her when a photo of her winning the state boxing championship came in the newspaper. This, however, did not deter her from pursuing a career in boxing. “I still remember I was castigated by my father who said with a battered and bruised face, I should not expect to get married. He was furious that I took to boxing – a taboo for women – and he did not have the slightest idea about it. But my passion for the sport had got the better of me and I thank my cousins who coaxed and cajoled my father into eventually giving his nod. I’m happy that I did not let anybody down,” she told in September 2004. Mary Kom decided to enter into the ring with determination and strong will. To pursue her dream of becoming a world class pugilist, she joined Sports Authority of India, Khuman Lampak and underwent an intensive training from coach and mentor, Shri. Ibomcha Singh.

At a tender age of 18, Mary made her debut at the first Women World Boxing Championship, after just one year of starting to learn boxing, which was held at Pennsylvania, USA. At her debut event itself, she won a silver medal in the 46 kg weight category. A year later, she went on to win the gold at the second Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur (AIBA) World Women’s Senior Boxing Championship. held at Antalya, Turkey. Mary Kom is a mother of twin sons. In 2008, she came back from a two-year maternity break to clinch her fourth boxing gold in World Championships. That instantly won her the name “Magnificent Mary”.

The family came to know of the problem in her son Khupneivar’s heart when he was four years old. After consulting with a doctor friend who is now based in Chandigarh, Mary decided to have the procedure done at Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in

Chandigarh, which is close to NIS, Patiala, where she has been training. Mary Kom fought Asian champion Kim Myong Sim in the title bout at the Asian Cup women's boxing tournament in Haikou, China, little Khupneivar cheered for mummy from his hospital bed in Chandigarh.

Mary Kom's Quotes

"Don't give up as there is always a next time. Think that if Mary Kom, a mother of two, can do it, why can't you?"

"I do not only rely on my technique or strength but also on my mind."

"To be a successful boxer one must also have a strong heart. Some women are physically strong but fail when it comes to having a strong heart. One also must have the zeal and the right fighting spirit," says Mary kom.

"We work harder than men and are determined to fight with all our strength to make our nation proud. God has given me the talent and it's only because of sheer grit and hard work that I have made it so far."

"If I, being a mother of two, can win a medal, so can you all. Take me as an example and don't give up".

"People used to say that boxing is for men and not for women and I thought I will show them some day. I promised myself and I proved myself"

"Boxing is not easy. When I started, my male friends would say it is not a woman's sport. But I say if men can do it then why not women."

Ms. Kom said marriage and motherhood also posed as a challenge to her. "When I had two children even my father did not believe in me, let alone others. However, my family's love and support helped me to reach my dream."

Likening her story to that of David facing Goliath, Mary Kom says, "I always remember I am also so small and Manipur is very small, but if I pray and if I do very hard work then I will win."

Mary Kom is a five time successive World Boxing champion, a biennial amateur boxing competition organised by the International Boxing Association (AIBA). She is the only woman boxer to have won a medal in each one of the six World Championships. As of June 2012, she is ranked world no. 4 in the 51 kg women's category by AIBA. She has more than three Asian titles and eleven National titles under her belt. She is a recipient of the Arjuna Award, the Padma Shri Award, the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award and a special award from AIBA. Mary Kom created history by becoming first person from north east to win bronze medal in Olympics 2012. Mary Kom has overcome gender bias, poverty, the limitations of her small size, and the disadvantages of the small region to win the olympic medal for boxing. She is an inspiration not only for the North-Eastern people but also for women who endure hardships on a daily basis.

### **Heart touching story of Hima Das**

Hima Das was born in a poor family near Kandhulimari village in Assam's Nagaon district on 9 January. Her parents, Ronjit and Jonali Das belong to the indigenous Kaibarta community. Both of them do farming to support the family. She did her alma mater at the Dhing Public High School. There Das was interested in playing football, a sport she would play with the boys. Although she wished to continue playing football, Hima was advised to change her preference to sprinting. It was Shamshul Sheikh, a teacher at the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, who gave the most valuable piece of information to the youngster after watching her incredible speed while playing football. What followed is history.

Hima 's achievement is even more remarkable if we consider

that she started using spikes only a couple of years ago. The eldest of the six siblings, Hima's superior talent first came to light at an inter-district meet back in 2016. Due to the unavailability of a professional running track, she had to practice on a muddy football field. However, in spite of the lack of training facilities and equipment available, the resilient sprinter scalped a bronze medal in the state meet. Later that year, she reached the 100m final at the junior nationals. Eventually, Das qualified for the women's 200m event at the Asian Youth Championships, Bangkok. She went on to finish seventh in the tournament. However, her time of 24.52 seconds was luckily enough to qualify for the World Youth Championships to be held in Nairobi. There, Das eventually finished at the fifth spot with an overall time of 24.31 seconds.

After the initial development, Hima Das built on that success to compete well in the 2018 Commonwealth Games at Gold coast, Australia in April 2018. She was competing in the 400 meters as well as the 4x400 meters relay. In the former, Das reached the final. However, she had to suffice herself with a sixth-place finish that came in a time of 51.32 seconds. Her timing was just 1.17 seconds more than Botswana's gold medalist Amantle Montsho. The 4x400 meters relay was also disappointing since the Indian team could only finish seventh in the final. They had a timing of 3 minutes and 33.61 seconds.

Then on On 12 July 2018, Das tasted her first-ever win. Her maiden accomplishment came in the 400m final at the World U-20 Championships 2018 held at Tampere in Finland. She had clocked 51.46 seconds to reach the summit. Moreover, she had become the first Indian sprinter to ever win a gold medal at an international track event. In the match, her run was slower in the first half. However, she timely accelerated in the last 100-meter stretch. Das won the competition in dramatic fashion, overtaking as many as three competitors to get the top honours.

### **Hima Das at Asian Games**

The 2018 Asian Games was a similar story. Das qualified for the 400m final, clocking 51.00 in heat 1 and setting a new Indian national record. On 26 August 2018, she bettered the national record to 50.79 seconds in the 400m final. More importantly, she won the silver medal. Four days later, Das, in association with M. R. Poovamma, Sarita Gayakwad and V. K. Vismaya scripted history. The quartet won the women's 4 x 400 meters relay by clocking an incredible time of 3:28.72. This was a fitting compensation for Hima, who had failed to qualify for the final of the 200 meters race earlier on the same day. It was a false start in the semifinal that had let her down back then. Hima also won a silver medal in the 4x400 m mixed relay to complete a record-breaking haul at the continental extravaganza.

Aged only 18, Hima Das was conferred with the Arjuna Award by President, Shri Ram Nath Kovind in 2018 for excellence in Athletics, in a glittering ceremony, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi on September 25, 2018. The Government of Assam further appointed her as the state's brand ambassador for sports. Later that year, UNICEF-India appointed the Asian Games gold-medalist sprinter as India's first ever youth ambassador. Furthermore, the Indian government would provide Hima Das 'end-to-end' funding until the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

Hima Das was born in a joint family of 17 in the Kandhulimari village near Dhing in Assam to Ranjit and Jonali Das. Her parents belong to the indigenous Kaibarta

community. Both of them do farming to support the family. As Ranjit was a fast runner himself, he saw no reason to deny Hima from pursuing sprinting. He saw “real passion” in Hima, according to him. However, it was Jonali who had certain reservations with her decision to run. This was natural, considering Hima’s profession required her to travel to faraway places, on her own.

### **Conclusion**

Good sportsmanship is the most important aspect of the game. Sometimes games will get intense, heated and personal; therefore, sportsmanship must be learned in order to be practiced in sticky situations. If athletes weren’t reprimanded for unfit behavior, there would be no guidelines for others to follow. Of course there’s talent and hard work, which are both very important parts of sports, but without sportsmanship and self-discipline, there would likely be chaos throughout various levels of play. When athletes go “beyond the game,” they look outside of what it takes to win a game, but decide to be a good teammate, good opponent and good person. Everyone may have a tad bit different definition of good sportsmanship, but first-class sportsmanship all leads to the same goal of having clean, fun competition with the outcome of creating champions who excel both on and off the court.

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