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# GRIT

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“A champion is someone who gets up when he can’t.”

~ **Jack Dempsey**

*“It’s not whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get up.”*

~ **Vince Lombardi**

*“I hated every minute of training, but I said, Don’t quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life a champion.”*

~ **Muhammad Ali**

*“Life doesn’t get easier or more forgiving, we get stronger and more resilient.”*

~ **Steve Maraboli**

*“You don’t get much done if you only work on the days when you feel like it.”*

~ **Jerry West**

What happens when we get knocked down? Do we get up quickly and keep going? Do we even get up at all?

Heather Dorniden was the University of Minnesota’s most decorated women’s track and field athlete in school history. She held 10 school records and in 2008 won the University of Minnesota’s Golden Gonly female athlete of the year. Dorniden earned All-American honors an astounding eight times. Dorniden is a very successful athlete, but she may be best known for what happened in one race in 2008.

During the final heat of the 600-meter race at the Big Ten Indoor Track Championship in 2008, she led the pack after 400 meters (2 laps). But at the start-finish line she accidentally tripped and fell. With only one lap (200 meters) to go, it seemed like her race was over.

Many people would be discouraged by this and maybe not even finish the race. Dorniden had another thought completely. Her thoughts remained positive and focused on her team rather than herself.

“Since I didn’t think I fell as hard as I did, I was shocked to see how much of a gap had formed between me and the rest of the race”, said Dorniden. “At that point in the meet, I knew the point scores were close for the team championship, so all I really thought was I need to keep running, because if I finish I’ll at least earn one point.”

“As I started running, I began to gain on one girl, and then the rest of the pack didn’t seem that far away”, continued Dorniden. “I thought, Wouldn’t it be cool if I caught them all? Then, on the final curve, I heard the in-house announcer say, “Watch out for Heather Dorniden!!” and I thought, “Yeah!! Watch out! I’m coming!” And from there, it was just this incredible surge of energy and an effortless press for the finish line.”<sup>1</sup>

At a moment when many would have given up Dorniden did the opposite. She experienced unexpected, non-ideal circumstances and literally got up and pushed forward. There are many stories of athletes winning races, but Dorniden’s win in that heat was inspiring not because she won a title or received a medal, but because she was resilient. She

would go on to place second in the Championship heat of the Big 10's 600-meter indoor event helping her Minnesota team take first overall.

When obstacles occur, most people choose to let that limit them, but true champions (like Dorniden) choose to overcome and accomplish more than they ever thought they could because of it. One of the first quotes I ever heard when I got into sports was "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal."

Dorniden had a goal and that was to win that race. She refused to let anything distract her from that goal. Gritty people can look at situations and ignore most of what is going on – the majority of things that they can't control – and instead, focus on the things that they can control. They focus on the goal.

Dr. Angela Duckworth wrote the book on grit. Literally. The author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* gave a TED Talk that has been viewed more than 13 million times online. Through her work as a teacher and psychologist, she has discovered that anyone can outwork their perceived talent level or IQ with grit. She says that grit is the thing that predicts success far more than intelligence or upbringing. She defines grit as a sustaining interest, passion, and persistence for a goal over the long term.

Dorniden personified grit. So too did Kirk Gibson when he was sick and injured yet hit a 9<sup>th</sup> inning pinch-hit homerun to win game 1 of the 1988 World Series. This moment would provide inspiration to his teammates as the Los Angeles

Dodgers would go on to win the World Series.

Brett Favre seemed to demonstrate grit all the time as the Green Bay Packers star quarterback but on December 22, 2003, he took it up a level when he passed for four touchdowns, threw for 399 yards and had the highest passer rating of his career in a 41-7 win against the Oakland Raiders. This was all done one day after his dad, whom he was extremely close to, died from a heart attack.

Perhaps one of the grittiest performances ever in American sports history was when Kerri Strug severely injured her ankle on the vault during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Even though she was hurt, her team needed her final vault attempt to be nearly flawless if they were to win the gold medal. Limping around, noticeably injured and in extreme pain, she attempted her last vault. She needed a 9.5 and got a 9.7 while landing on just one leg.

We might never have a national TV platform like some athletes do but we have opportunities every day to overcome obstacles and focus on our goals. We have people always watching us. We can be a source of inspiration to those around us. If nothing else, we can inspire ourselves as we overcome our challenges and regardless of our talent, persevere to achieve our goals. We can say that the fire inside of us burned brighter than the fire that burned around us. We can say that we have grit!