

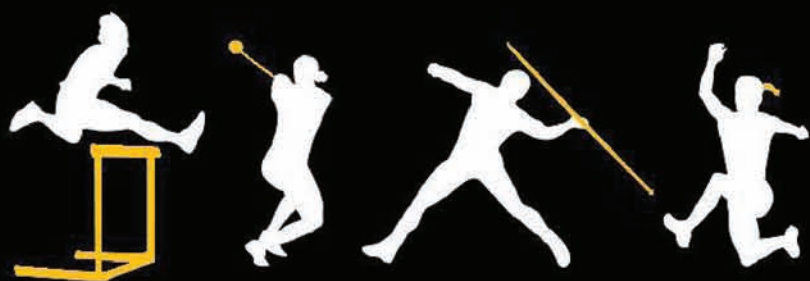
JOCK-DOCS: World-Class Athletes Wearing White Coats gives us a rare glimpse into the exciting lives of eight contemporary overachievers. How these successful athletes drove themselves to the upper levels of their sports is only equaled by their subsequent pursuits of difficult careers in the healing arts. The true stories of these individuals' various accomplishments are masterfully chronicled by Dr. Ray Aquitania, who is well-versed in the challenges of athletics and the world of medicine.

JOCK-DOCS: World-Class Athletes Wearing White Coats

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JOCK-DOCS

World-Class Athletes Wearing White Coats

RAY E. AQUITANIA, M.D.



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On the front cover, clockwise from top left:

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P r e f a c e

Sheri and I were awakened from our light nap by the captain's voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as we begin our approach to Vancouver International Airport, please be sure that your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position."

We were both startled and invigorated as his overhead announcement continued.

"Make sure your seat belts are fastened securely and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead storage bins. Also, turn off all electronic devices until the aircraft is safely parked at the gate."

This would be my second and this was to be her first. Olympic Games, that is.

Several minutes later and 20,000 feet closer to Earth, the pilot proclaimed, "Welcome to Vancouver. Local time is 3:14 p.m. and the temperature is 7 degrees Celsius. Thank you for flying with United. And enjoy the Games!"

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Ever since I was a young lad, I have always made time for the Olympics. The spectacle of world-class athletes competing on the international stage. The herculean efforts in a sport for which one has trained for years. The pride in both individual and homeland achievements on the various competition venues. And those highly sought-after medals made of gold, silver, and bronze.

For two weeks, all those obscure and not-so-obscure sports would be televised for endless hours in any given Olympic Games. I admired these men and women who worked tirelessly for years for the chance to compete and hopefully triumph in competitions that only took place every four years. The personal profiles of selected athletes intrigued me, giving a human side to those who sometimes displayed superhuman abilities.

I attended my first Olympic Games in 2002 at Salt Lake City, Utah. The Vancouver Winter Games in February 2010 were my second Olympics. And my excitement at this multi-sport event in the province of British Columbia, Canada, was all too apparent to Sheri.

As she had not experienced such a live spectacle in the past, Sheri was thrilled all the more. She and I joined in the spirit of the large crowds and cheered on the athletes from the participating nations. We ended up seeing live contests in hockey, luge, and speed skating, and the numerous television monitors allowed us to view the many other Winter Olympic sports on any given day.

Sheri and I found the cities of Vancouver and nearby Whistler to be extremely scenic. Moreover, the hospitality and friendliness of the local Canadians were very appealing. Amidst this atmosphere, we also sensed the somber mood surrounding the death of Nodar Kumaritashvili, the 21-year-old Georgian luge athlete who died in a practice run on the day before the Vancouver Games began.

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My competitive nature surfaced in childhood as I was challenged in sports by my friends and brother Manny, who is just one year my junior. However, despite our desire to play organized school sports, my brother and I were only allowed by our parents to participate in intramural sports when our schoolwork was done. Their priority for us was academics, but we still managed to thrive in various sports, such as tennis, golf, and basketball.

To this day, Manny continues to stay physically fit, and he competes annually in the 7.5-mile San Francisco Bay to Breakers footrace, held each May. In his 25+ Bay to Breakers competitions, he has finished as high as the top 10% of the more than 24,000 runners. Manny currently lives with his wife Rose and daughter Rachel in Northern California.

Ron Aquitania, my youngest brother, was born in Canada, in the province of Ontario. He is also quite the athlete, starting with 5-kilometer and 12-kilometer races in 1992 and eventually expanding into marathons and half-marathons since 2001. To date, Ron has completed over 30 marathons and 25 half-marathons without major injuries.

As for me, physical education and sports competition became integral parts of my life starting in grade school. And like any wide-eyed and optimistic child or adolescent, I dreamed of someday getting a gold medal in “my sport” and bringing fame and glory to myself and my country.

But life’s many hurdles would soon get in the way.

When would I have the time to train all those hours? Could I take a few years off school? Would the time away from school be worth it? Who would pay for expenses during all those years? Is there a “fast track” to getting a gold medal?

My parents and I casually looked into the logistics of becoming an Olympian, but more and more barriers came up, and the idea just faded over time.

An example close to me underscores the difficulty in succeeding in or even reaching the Olympic Games. A good

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friend of mine, Kim Phares, is a football and gymnastics *aficionado*. Her eldest daughter, Carly, is a talented gymnast and exceptional student. She has won the all-around competitions at four different California state gymnastics championships and also the all-around contest at the regional championships that included teams from Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. In addition, young Carly Phares graduated from Carlton Oaks Junior High School with a 4.0 grade point average.

Regrettably, Olympic medals are not in the cards for this *wunderkind*. The time away from home, costs involved, and interruption in her traditional school education make Olympic goals unrealistic for Kim and her overachieving daughter.

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My desire to become a doctor would emerge in my childhood and early teenage years, when television shows like *Medical Center*, *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, and *Ben Casey* (reruns) aired. These series were my first exposure to the field of medicine. I appreciated the relative ease with which the doctor characters took care of their patients and the satisfaction in a job well done. The workings of the human body also fascinated me, and the sight of blood and needles never deterred me from pursuing a career as a physician.

Realizing my potential to flourish later in a medical or other professional career, my parents Manuel Aquitania and Aster Aquitania instilled in me the value of getting a good education. They felt that such an ethos would give me the opportunity to be whatever I wanted to be when I grew up. Since they were successful themselves, he in chemical engineering and she in chemistry and then cost engineering, I had no reason to question their convictions.

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Given my affinity to sports, it was no surprise that I treated academics in school also as a type of competition. On one level, I was competing with the other students to get good grades and establish who would “win” the test or examination. On another level, I was competing with myself to better or equal my previous academic performances.

Becoming valedictorian of my high school was just another triumph for me in my “contest” with school peers. Subsequently, I attended the University of California at Berkeley, where I continued to have this competitive mindset. I found myself more focused in my studies if there was some “winner” at the end of each test.

After graduating *magna cum laude* from Berkeley with a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering in 1985, I took on the medical school curriculum at the Chicago Medical School in North Chicago, Illinois. There, the extreme challenge of learning a plethora of facts and concepts in a limited amount of time became all too real.

Having no mentors in the medical field as I grew up, I discovered that the required medical school classes would be more difficult than I had ever imagined. But the camaraderie among us medical students became crucial as we all strove to succeed in the difficult process of becoming a doctor.

My tried-and-true method of “competing” to get good grades was changing. Now, instead of studying hard just to “defeat” the next medical student, I began to learn the facts and concepts in medical school to build my knowledge base. My goal was to excel in school in order to benefit my patients’ health in the near future. And I found that most of my fellow students made it through the many tough classes with the same attitude.

New challenges appeared when rotations in clinics and hospitals began in the second half of medical school. At that point, we medical students had to think on our feet and apply all that book knowledge to actual patient care.

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Performing patient interviews and examinations, learning to use medical instruments, using laboratory and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and other technologies, and interacting with the different levels of expertise in the medical hierarchy became daily tasks.

Soon after I graduated from the Chicago Medical School with my medical degree, the responsibilities of taking care of patients with less and less supervision became a daily challenge. And as we learned more techniques and principles of patient care, we were expected to teach what we knew to medical students and interns/residents with less experience.

The path through medical training exposes the student to the various medical and surgical specialties. Having completed all my major medical school rotations, I eventually decided that neurology would become my area of expertise. I was attracted to the complexities and anatomy of the central and peripheral nervous systems, the available and emerging treatments for the various diseases in the discipline, and the different settings in which a neurologist can practice. In addition, the interaction of the nervous system with the other organ systems in the human body was especially engrossing to me.

Once my formal training in internal medicine and neurology was complete, I entered the real world and spent two years as an active neurologist in a large multi-specialty medical group in San Diego, California. Come 1995, I became board certified in the specialty of neurology.

Still, the prerogative to practice medicine as I saw fit had always been a desire of mine. It follows that after my two-year contract with the medical group was up, I decided to begin my solo private practice, knowing that I had always possessed that independent spirit.

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Practicing the art and science of medicine continues to enrich my life and in the process help the needs of my patients. Since my efforts directly impact other people's health, being well-read and paying attention to detail are two important qualities I strive for. Of course, my ability to communicate effectively and execute the optimal plan of treatment are of utmost importance to any patient I encounter.

As I have run my private neurology practice for over 17 years now, I continue to maintain physical fitness and compete in many sports. Often, I play pick-up basketball and do weight training at the 24 Hour Fitness gymnasiums. Competitive golf in high school has led to the occasional round now, with me shooting usually in the middle 80's. My 13th marathon footrace was completed in May 2010 at Palos Verdes, California (the second longest continuously running marathon in the United States). And triathlon training is in the works.

Medicine and sports, the two passions of mine, have been huge parts of my life. As is to be expected, though, the practice of medicine takes up the majority of my time.

Last year, I happened to watch a History Channel television show featuring Roger Bannister. He is the Briton who broke the 4-minute barrier in running the mile on May 6th 1954, over fifty years ago. Bannister also finished 4th place, just out of the medals, in the 1500-meter distance at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland.

What I did not know was that Bannister practiced as a neurologist for 40 years after his competitive running career was over. I also discovered that he considered his neurology career the most important of his life achievements.

After learning the Roger Bannister saga, I was amazed at how a world-class athlete and Olympian, with years of devotion to the sport of running, could also succeed in the rigorous process of becoming an accomplished doctor. Aware of the difficulty in both feats, I proceeded to do

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some research on how many individuals have managed to do well in both trying endeavors.

It turns out that such a career resumé is rare indeed.

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In the many pages to follow, the riveting lives of eight contemporary athlete-doctors are described in vivid detail. All of them established their reputations of world-class success in the sports world before taking on the additional challenge of becoming dedicated doctors. A few were actually in the middle of their medical (or acupuncture) training at the time of their most important sports achievements. In common, they excelled on the world stage in their sports before later striving to be the best doctors they can be.

Most of our eight jock-docs run active medical practices now and have very busy lives. With my credentials as a seasoned neurologist and avid sportsman, I had the opportunity to personally interview and get to know each of them to gain insight on their experiences, motivations, and personalities.

Given my depth of knowledge in medicine and sports performance and the challenges in both undertakings, I have been able to appreciate all of their perspectives and unique experiences. And thanks to the listening and interviewing skills I have acquired as a physician, I have managed to successfully delve into the complicated lives of our eight exceptional individuals.

At this time, I wish to personally thank each and every one of our eight remarkable athlete-doctors. This book would not have been possible without their interest and candor. And of course, I am grateful for their generosity with their time.

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As you will soon learn, the lives of the overachieving jock-docs in this book have been nothing short of extraordinary. These true stories will hopefully entertain and amaze and motivate all of us to expand our horizons and pursue avenues we did not think possible.

We should also consider what, if anything, did these individuals forgo or sacrifice in order to achieve their triumphs in sports and academics.

Also, does it naturally follow that a superior world-class athlete will do well in a demanding academic setting and career later in life?

And do our athlete-doctors have an inherent *joie de vivre* or just the disciplined will to succeed in their goals at any cost?

In this Olympic year of 2010, the 114th year of the Olympic Games in the Modern era, I am happy to present the phenomenal exploits of eight contemporary world-class athletes who have decided to devote their lives to the benevolent and caring practice of medicine or acupuncture.

JOCK-DOCS: World-Class Athletes Wearing White Coats gives us a rare glimpse into the exciting lives of eight contemporary overachievers. How these successful athletes drove themselves to the upper levels of their sports is only equaled by their subsequent pursuits of difficult careers in the healing arts. The true stories of these individuals' various accomplishments are masterfully chronicled by Dr. Ray Aquitania, who is well-versed in the challenges of athletics and the world of medicine.

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