

GOOD SPORTS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATIONS BY SCOTT GREER

Young LDS athletes aim high in both their physical and spiritual goals.

Whether they run, swim, jump, throw, or kick, athletes typically achieve victory by prevailing in competition against other athletes. But most of them will tell you that the real victory comes in the competition against yourself. In many ways, athletics parallels our spiritual struggle to overcome our natural selves and become the best we can be. It requires goal-setting, discipline, dedication, and perseverance.

Here are a few young LDS athletes whose participation in athletics has helped them better understand and live the gospel and has taught them how to maintain balance in their lives.

Enduring to the Finish Line

Name: Chris Carter

Age: 21

Sport: Track and field (hurdles, sprints)

Location: Utah, USA (currently serving in Canada Toronto East Mission)

Major Achievement: Gold medalist in the 400-meter hurdles and the 4x400-meter relay at the 2006 World Junior Track and Field Championship in Beijing, China.



“Running has taught me about hard work and enduring to the end—even when you want to quit. Because the prize at the end is what matters, and the hardships of life are always

worth enduring to obtain that prize.”





Dojo Mojo

Name: Nicoli Scalco

Age: 22

Sport: Karate

Location: Santa Catarina, Brazil

Major Achievement: Placed first in women's individuals above 55 kg. in the Brazilian Karate Championship; chosen to represent Brazil in the 2007 world karate championships; chosen to participate in the 2008 Worldwide Championship of World Traditional Karate Association.



"You need to add love to everything you do. When you do anything with all your heart, Heavenly Father will help you in the end. This is what happens in each battle, each victory, and even each defeat.

"Sport ends up proving to us that discipline is crucial. It shows that we must learn to live wisely, and it teaches us how to relate with other people and that we need to have confidence in ourselves. It shows also that we need to improve and to search, fight for, and follow good teachings. And what else could provide us better teaching than the restored gospel? At some point in life we will surely need to make a decision, and through the gospel we certainly choose what is right, because we believe in it. Sport teaches us that you have to believe in yourself to succeed. And the same goes for the gospel—you need to believe in it with all your heart, follow it, respect it. That is crucial to our lives."

Not Throwing Away Your Goals

Name: Billy Matthews

Age: 18

Sport: Track and field (discus)

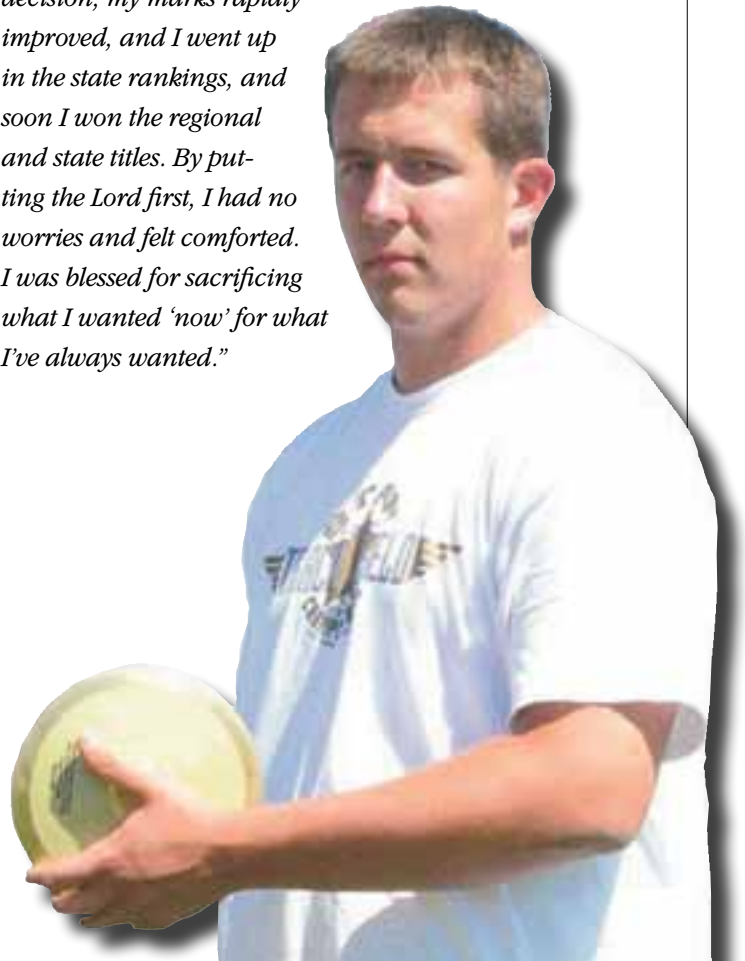
Location: Washington, USA

Major Achievement: 2007

Washington State high school discus champion with a throw of 164 feet, 8 inches.



"In track two of my goals were to earn a scholarship and to win the state title. I had also set the goal to serve a mission. During my senior year I was offered two scholarships. I worried about which school to attend, and my throwing marks began to suffer as well. Eventually another school offered a scholarship, and athletically I was sure this was the school for me. But once again my marks decreased, and I began to question my decision. I finally realized something I had learned from one of my seminary teachers: 'Don't give up what you want most, for what you want now.' That's what I had been doing. I decided that I needed to put the Lord first in everything. Shortly after making this decision, my marks rapidly improved, and I went up in the state rankings, and soon I won the regional and state titles. By putting the Lord first, I had no worries and felt comforted. I was blessed for sacrificing what I wanted 'now' for what I've always wanted."



A Golden Spike

Name: Lorena Gomes de Azevedo
Ribeiro Araujo

Age: 14

Sport: Volleyball

Location: Tocantins, Brazil

Major Achievement: In 2007, her team won a gold medal in the 2007 Olympic and City Games of Palmas and a bronze medal in the nationwide Brazilian Students Games.



"I have always been encouraged by my family; they have supported me a lot. I'm doing what I really love to do. Because I love this sport, I never leave my other responsibilities behind, rather I also do my best to include other things in my everyday life. I recognize the hand of the Lord in everything, but I know that I have a lot of things to do myself. I express my appreciation for the talent the Lord gave me. As each day goes by, I know that I must do much more, and most importantly, I have to be an example to the people around me. I have to bring the gospel wherever I go and be a light to the world."



A Kicking Habit

Name: Brandon Newman-Smith

Age: 14

Sport: Tae kwon do

Location: Brighton, England

Major Achievement: Undefeated UK tae kwon do champion in the 12- to 13-year old category at the Junior ITF Impact Competition; second



place in the 14- to 17-year-old category as the youngest competitor.



"I spend six to seven hours training in tae kwon do every week. This is often difficult, as I need to balance this between my schoolwork and the gospel. I have been taught to keep important things first, so

sometimes the odd training session gets missed.

"Tae kwon do has taught me that you get nothing in life unless you put in the effort. Since starting from a white belt, tae kwon do has been hard work. The first grade is a yellow tag, which means the earth as a seed is sown and takes root as training begins. This reminds me of the Aaronic Priesthood, becoming a deacon, teacher, and priest and preparing for the Melchizedek Priesthood. Seeds of the gospel are sown, and they too take root and develop into a strong tree with deep, strong roots. The gospel has the answers to challenges, and while tae kwon do is an art that develops me physically, it disciplines me mentally. I then use that discipline in my life and the gospel

when things get hard or I feel fed up. Keeping the Word of Wisdom has made me strong. I am not very large in stature, yet on the day of the competition I fought off boys bigger than myself.

“Last October I moved into the 14 to 17 age category up to black belts. I was very scared when I saw my group. Not only was I the youngest (the rest in my group being 17), I was also the smallest. My dad, who is a black belt in taekwon do, was a judge in my competition, and even he said he was praying I didn’t get killed! My sister, who is also a black belt, was judging in the next ring, and she said she never prayed so much! It was like David and Goliath.

“I couldn’t believe it when I won my first round, then second, and ended up in the final. Everybody had expected this competition would be just for experience for me. They were shocked when I got to the final. After being penalized three points, I lost by only two points to a 17-year-old black belt. I nearly won it, and that would have been a major achievement—a 14-year-old beating all the 17-year-olds. I knew my Heavenly Father had answered my prayers to do my best. I learned that faith without works is dead.”

A Master Stroke

Name: Karlee Bispo

Age: 17

Sport: Swimming

Location: California, USA

Major Achievement: Qualified for the 2008 U.S. Olympic trials in four events; set U.S. high school record in 200-yard freestyle.



“Balancing sports, academics, and Church obligations like seminary is very challenging, but keeping up my spirituality helps me maintain a balance for my other responsibilities. My academics come before my sport, and my love for the gospel and what it offers me just comes naturally.

“Swimming is a talent from my Heavenly Father, and I am watched by many people who know me and by many who do not. I can be an example to all of those people by



not only achieving success at swimming but also by choosing Christ-like actions. There are those who look up to athletes because of their great athletic accomplishments. I also want to be known for being a righteous daughter of God.”



On a Roll

Name: Adam Schmuki

Age: 17

Sport: Wheelchair sports (swimming, racing, etc.)

Location: Arizona, USA

Major Achievement: Won six gold medals and four bronze medals at the 2007 International Junior Wheelchair and Amputee Sports World Championships in South Africa.



"I have learned to prioritize my time between church, sports, and school. It is difficult at times because I have to miss school for some events. Sports allow me to meet different people from across the country and be a good example to them."



Leaps of Faith

Name: Yukio Gall

Age: 20

Sport: Track and field (long jump)

Location: Amazonas, Brazil (currently serving in the Brazil Rieirão Preto Mission)

Major Achievement: Represented Brazil in the 2006 Pan-American Games in Mexico, receiving gold medals in the long jump, triple jump, and freestyle.



*"You know when you do everything to obtain what you want? My family battled hard to go to the temple [after joining the Church in 2002]. I find that that is a quality that our family has—we do not give up on the things that are certain. My results improved after the true gospel of Jesus Christ entered our lives! I have several goals: I intend to follow firmly in the gospel, honorably fulfill my mission, marry in the temple, have a family, and be a competent professional in engineering and physiotherapy. Who knows? Maybe I'll be an engineer in the work of constructing sacred temples." **NE***