The Sports Gene Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Sports Gene is a look into the effect that genes have on our abilities, motivations, and endurance in sports, and explains why some groups of people are better suited for certain sports.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:

Have you ever wanted to compete in the Olympics? When I was a young boy I remember seeing Apolo Anton Ohno win gold medals in speed skating. I loved rollerblading at the time and my goal was to compete in the Olympics one day. Quickly learning how difficult the years of training and commitment are, I didn't pursue my dream for long.

Since then, however, I've learned that not all success in sports is the result of hard work. Some athletes are actually genetically inclined to be better at certain sports. This genetic baseline physiology is the topic of David Epstein's *The Sports Gene: Inside the Science of Extraordinary Athletic Performance*.

This book will help you see a little about which sports you might be physiologically well-adapted for, along with how much you can improve. You might be surprised to learn what malaria in Africa has to do with being a good runner. And you'll also discover what genetics has to do with how much you enjoy exercise, and why that might make it harder for you to get to the gym.

Here are 3 fascinating lessons from this book about how genes influence sports:

1. Knowing what body type you have, among other genetic factors, will help you determine which sports you'd be the best at.
2. How much you want to train and how well you endure are traits of your genes.
3. Adaptations to the bodies of certain locations in Africa make the people much better at running than the rest of the world.

Get your running shoes or basketball shorts ready, this book will make you want to get out and play sports!

Lesson 1: You may have the body type of a swimmer or a basketball player, and you have your genes to thank for that.

We all know that tall people make great basketball players. Experts estimate that 80% of the variation in height is due to genes. So, unfortunately, tall people really are just born good at basketball. But did you know that short people have a few advantages in this sport as well? Some have stronger Achilles tendons that help them jump higher or a longer arm span for a greater reach.

Let's take a look at running. **Genetic differences between short and long-distance runners make certain people naturally better at one or the other.** Thin legs and a slim torso are common in the best marathon or long-distance runners. They may also have smaller bodies, which makes for a bigger skin surface area relative to body volume, which helps them release heat more efficiently.

Sprinters, on the other hand, have shorter legs which allow them to accelerate faster. Their muscles have more fast-twitch fibers, which contract quickly, allowing more explosive movements that are beneficial in short-distance races. Long-distance runners don't have this trait but instead have more slow-twitch fibers which have better stamina for those lengthy races.

Short legs are also common in elite swimmers. Michael Phelps is one of these, with an inseam of just 32 inches. At 6'4", however, he's tall with a longer upper body and arms. All of these genetic traits made him even better at swimming than most people.

Take a look at some of your body characteristics. What sports might you be good at based on your height or build?

Lesson 2: Endurance and motivation are also genetic factors that influence how good you can become at sports.

While you may not think of it, genes also determine how likely you are to get up and go to the gym. Studies indicate that much of the difference in exercise people get is because of genetic makeup.

Some individual's brains aren't as good at sensing pleasure. To get that "runner's high," for example, one may have to work much harder than another. This makes it hard to get to the gym. Other factors than enjoyment may be to blame for the motivation to exercise. **Pam Reed, for example, has to run up to five times daily.** Without doing so she gets sick, which is a great reason to keep exercising!

Your pain threshold also determines how much exercise you are willing to endure. Those with a high tolerance for discomfort will work harder and exercise more than those who don't. And you guessed it, this is another factor that is largely genetic.

Take a look at your body's risk of injury as well. This is one more trait you can thank your parents and grandparents for that affects how much you exercise. Some people have stronger bones or tissue, and some bodies are quicker to recover from damage than others. All of this comes into play when you're deciding whether or not you want to get out for a run or bike ride.

Lesson 3: Specific places in Africa have all the right conditions to make genetically superior runners.

If you remember watching the summer Olympics, you know how successful people from the African countries are in running. But what is it about this region that makes such powerful runners? Let's take a closer look.

Kenya and Ethiopia are two countries with the most world-class long-distance runners. Because these areas are closer to the equator and hotter, the people evolved smaller bodies, which, as we learned before helps them disperse heat more efficiently. This natural happening made for better runners.

Additionally, because of the high altitude of these regions, the people have larger lungs and higher red blood cell counts. Both of these make for much more powerful runners.

Looking back on the history of these countries, their ancestors had to run long distances to raid cattle from other tribes for survival. Generally, people in these areas just run more each day than most of the rest of the world, so they are continually improving at the sport.

And as crazy as it sounds, malaria might even be the reason that some Africans run so well. Because of the high prevalence of this disease, only the healthiest people survive it. Those with more resilient red blood cells made it, and this trait is still common in their genes

today.

The Sports Gene Summary Review

The Sports Gene was interesting for me to read because I've been a runner for many years. I had no idea about some of these genetic advantages and disadvantages that I have! The history of the genetics of elite athletes was also fascinating to discover, and is another reason I'd highly recommend this book!

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Who would I recommend The Sports Gene Summary summary to?

The 15-year-old who is trying out for sports teams and wants to know which she'd naturally be the best at, the 34-year-old who is interested to learn the physiological advantages of Olympic athletes, and anyone who likes to follow sports.