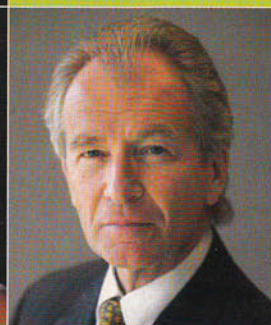


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A Championship Frame of Mind

Perdita Felicien's gold-medal dreams didn't die when she fell in the final of the 100-metre hurdles in Athens in 2004. She's one woman who knows how to get up when she's down.

By Perdita Felicien

I imagine yourself standing alone at a start line, poised and ready. You are living in a moment you have dreamt about forever. It is exactly as you imagined it – even the sound of the starter's voice with starting pistol in hand is the same. You wait for his commands. You can't understand them since they're not in English, but you have danced this dance a thousand times. Even though the song is not the same, you go by rhythm. Inside your stomach, monarchs fly, some gently fluttering their wings, others moving them feverishly. They may play in your stomach but your mind is the net that holds them.

Still, as strong as your desire is to truly live in this moment, there's the temptation to back down. "What if I don't get there? What if I can't do it?" You have only seconds to decide, so you choose to believe. You told yourself you would get here and you will not be denied. Your heart and spirit buy it, only your mind is left to convince. You tell it that anything this body wants it can will into being. Our mind is the only part of ourselves that can make what is intangible tangible.

This is how I felt the moment before I became World Champion in Paris in 2003. It was also the feeling I had in

Athens moments before my final. I know what it feels like to succeed and I know what it feels like to fail. I am not afraid of either. When we succeed, we celebrate; when we don't, we lose heart – after all, we're only human. But when you do lose heart, do not let it last too long. Commit yourself to turning things around. There is a fire that burns in all of us – in some it roars, in others it smokes. The kind you have in you will dictate how passionately you go after what you want and how intensely curious you are about what your full potential could be.

I am like everyone else and have days when I feel nothing is going my way, when I say, "What's the point?" Those are the days you should love because you get to show yourself how much fight you have in you. Your aspirations may not be that of an elite athlete – they may be to stick to that nutrition plan or work on that commitment to healthier living. Whatever they are, stay motivated and dig deep every day. Do not rely on anyone else. Always have your own ready supply of dedication and belief in yourself. Sure you may have people around you who are there to support you, but bring your own confidence just in case they run out!

You can go through life tentative, afraid of what others will say if you put your goals out there for all to see and maybe fall short. But playing it safe is boring, if you ask me. You may never know how low the lows are, but then you'll never know how high the highs are either. Or you can go for it – put everything you have into that one goal you want to reach. Just imagine how alive you'll feel when you get there. Pick your frame of mind and pick it well – it can empower you or devour you.

This journey towards our ultimate goal is a process. I wish we could all get there in a day, but instead it might take us many. I thought I'd reached mine on a smoldering August night in Greece, but I have since learned my own journey will take a bit longer. Whatever journey you are on, embrace it, and when that day finally comes, you'll be ready.



Perdita Felicien, hurdler extraordinaire, first Canadian woman to ever win an individual World Champion title. 2003 World Champion, and 2004 Indoor World Champion.