

**PLAY LIKE  
A CHAMPION  
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

# Champion Athlete Note

Developing Champion Athletes on and off the Field

## Endurance



*The following note is courtesy of Joanna Cote Thurman. Joanna is a 3-time Ironman finisher and a high school cross country and track coach. Joanna will be a speaker at this June's Sport Leadership Conference. She is pictured here with two members of Homeboy Industries running group (read more on Homeboy below).*

What makes a good endurance athlete? As an Ironman triathlete and high school cross country coach, endurance is the essential element in our fitness approach. But how do we get there? Some athletes are okay with being very uncomfortable for short periods of time – sprinters for example, while others are more willing to enter into a longer relationship with discomfort.

Going through this process and realizing the results is what builds the endurance athlete. I use the mantra of “get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” First, acknowledge that the work is going to be challenging, difficult, even painful, and then embrace it. Keeping workouts fresh and using distraction and teamwork also builds acceptance and tolerance. Being “in it together” creates a shared bond and support among athletes.

While long runs are not the favorite of everyone, a solid foundation of endurance, form, technique and fitness is required for all athletes. A good way to increase endurance and overcome resistance is a workout called a “fartlek” which is a Swedish word for “speed play.” In this workout, the athlete runs at a comfortable base pace and then chooses different landmarks to pick up speed for a defined distance, like from the mailbox to the big tree for example. Each time the distance or duration of the pickup increases. I coach my athletes to go five seconds, then 10 seconds longer than they think they can, pushing up the threshold until the distance and duration increase.



Ultimately, **the key to endurance comes from finding your *why*.** I talk with my student athletes about what motivates them, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. We can all be motivated by external factors such as competition, peer or parent pressure, school requirements and so on, but these can fade away when faced with the obstacles to achieving fitness and success in our sports. Lasting motivation comes from understanding our why, embracing the process, and getting comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Consider the following questions to help determine your why and grow in your endurance. This will help you to improve physically and mentally in any sport!

- **What is my motivation? Why am I doing this?**
- **Do I make excuses to avoid discomfort?**
- **What am I afraid of ?**
- **How do I find the “awesome” in challenging workouts?**
- **How do I build upon each success?**

*More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ~ Romans 5:3-5*

## Endurance for Life: Running at Homeboy



Joanna (the author of today's note) developed and implemented "the Homeboy running group" for **Homeboy Industries**, an organization in Los Angeles founded by Fr. Greg Boyle, that provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community.

The running group is a means to foster healing, manage stress, and build trust through the act of running, and in the process build community, fitness, and a spiritual connection to God's creation. Sharing life experiences, learning to become comfortable with being uncomfortable, building community, and connecting internally to one's spirit and nature are key elements of the Homeboy Running Program. Visit Joann's blog, [KonaJoanna.com](http://KonaJoanna.com) for more stories about the Homeboy running group experience.

Pictured above are Miguel and Hugo, two members of the Homeboy Industries community who will join Joanna as speakers at this **June's Sport Leadership Conference**. Miguel and Hugo will share their redemptive stories and provide their reflections on the parallels between Homeboy Industries and Play Like a Champion's mission.

## The Quotable Athlete

*Winning is not always  
the barometer of  
getting better.*

~ Tiger Woods



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