

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/what-sports-can-teach-entrepreneurs/>

Tim Brown, co-founder and co-CEO of Allbirds, shares three lessons being a professional athlete taught him about entrepreneurship: creating a sense of team, persistently practicing, and developing resilience.



Transcript

Tim Sport was really the foundation 00:00:04,980 for how I've thought about being an entrepreneur.. And there's so many similarities.. There's so much overlap.. I mean, let's start with the role of team.. I learned pretty early on, that, you know, to forge a professional sporting career, I didn't need to be good at everything.. I needed to be good at one or two things and do that better than anyone.. And that if I made myself irreplaceable within the context of a team, that I could make a professional career.. Now, let's be really clear.. I'd come out of university in America, didn't make it in the MLS, had gone to the Galaxy and got promptly booted out, went down to one of their feeder teams.. I'd battled my entire career..

But I realized that if I tried to be all things to all people, I wouldn't make it.. But if I was incredibly honest about the one or two things that I felt like I could do better than anyone else, that I could craft a career as a professional athlete.. And that's what I did.. And I also realized that being a part of a team, you know, there's the star players and then there's, and then there's the people that drive community, creativity, drive the sense of team.. You'll know those people in your classes, the people that give energy, the people that bind people together.. You can go an enormously long way by being one of those people.. And I think within sport, there's the star players.. I was never one of those, but I was a team person.. And I felt like I was the Shane Battier, who I actually met recently, that intangible person that was gonna help that group win.. And that was my superpower..

And I managed to make that a career and be part of a New Zealand team that went to the World Cup.. And it was a great journey.. I think the second thing about sport, it's a funny thing with sport.. You chip away at something for a long time.. Usually the same skill over and over and over again.. And oftentimes you don't really see the improvement, but you just gotta trust in the fullness of time that it's gonna compound and you're gonna get really, really good at something.. And I think oftentimes, particularly in entrepreneurship, you're looking for a silver bullet.. You're looking for that big idea.. And oftentimes, this is about grinding on something that you believe in deeply.. In the case of a wool shoe, I didn't invent wool, didn't grow up on a shoe, a sheep farm, as good as that would've been for the story..

Didn't invent shoes, had a kind of an obvious idea.. And I spent six years, over a hundred prototypes, trying to make a shoe made outta wool.. And lo and behold, stuck with it long enough to get good at it.. And I think we tend rather to massively

overestimate what we can achieve in the short term and underestimate what we can do in the long term if we stick with something.. And I think sport taught me that.. And I think it is really maybe my superpower in the context of entrepreneurship alongside the team piece.. And the last thing, you know, I think the resilience.. I remember a Monday night at a supermarket, not long after I'd become a professional, where a fan came up to me and said that I'd played particularly poorly in the last game as I was shopping for my vegetables.. (interviewer chuckles) And you get, you learn to understand that you have the ability far more than maybe you give yourself credit for, to pick yourself up and go again.. And I think sport gives you a pretty strong education in that..

And as an entrepreneur, you don't get anywhere without that..