

Matters of the Heart

Fall 2008

Among the many memorable moments from the 2008 Olympic Games; two distinctive images of two men burn in my memory. Who will ever forget Michael Phelps winning eight (yes eight!) gold medals, and by that feat becoming one of the greatest Olympians ever? Consider also the story of Jamaica's Usain "Lightning" Bolt—the world's fastest man who earned 3 gold medals for his stellar world record setting work in the 100-meter and 200-meter dashes; and for his part in securing the gold for Jamaica by running the third leg of the 4 by 100 meter relay. As I watched these two Olympians and contemplated on the significance of their superior achievements, it occurred to me that there may be lessons we can learn by carefully observing how each athlete approached their respective events. Bolt and Phelps are both highly trained and well conditioned athletes; both men undoubtedly had to sacrifice much to reach elite athlete status because one cannot achieve at their status on mere talent alone. Both men had to watch their diet carefully; get plenty of sleep and train constantly. Phelps commented publically that his life was reduced to three daily events; he ate, he swam and he slept.



Both athletes also achieved in dramatic form on the world stage. Phelps accomplished his rare feat with class and distinction, through blow out's and fingernail finishes; individually and with the help of his teammates. What a story of sacrifice and commitment! Bolt ran like greased lightning, and he often made it look easy. In the 100 meter dash, Bolt set the world mark despite slowing down, looking around, raising his arms in celebration and pounding his chest during the last few meters. I cannot help but wonder what he could have accomplished had he run at full speed for the entire race?

Therein lays the possible difference between these two men's performances; and a teachable moment for all of us. Compare Bolt's effort in the 100-meter dash to Phelps razor-thin effort to win the 100-meter butterfly by 1/100th of a second. Most would agree that Phelps gave it everything he had—he was whole-heartedly committed! Mr. Bolt on the other hand was on cruise control--enjoying the scenery as he finished the race. What could he have accomplished if he put the pedal to the medal throughout? Comparatively, what do you think would have happened had Phelps cruised into the finish? For Mr. Phelps the difference between being a great Olympian and perhaps the greatest Olympian of all time hung balance.

I had the distinct honor of visiting with one of our regions finest this past week. Before assuming elective office recently, he coached high school football in East Texas for a combined thirty-five years. He shared with me his philosophy and focus was always to coach his kids to be the very best they can be. He wanted and required the players to give him all of they had on the field, in the classroom, at home and in the community. Half-hearted and no-hearted efforts were not tolerated. Michael Phelps, it seems to me embodied these principles by his passionate pursuit of excellence and "no surrender" attitude. This is the kind of culture we aspire to attain and maintain here at ETCOG. As our customers and partners, we hope you will encourage us along by providing constructive input as we train to be the very best. In the final analysis however, our successful achievement of the quest to be the best is a **Matter of the Heart.**