

Mini-Lesson: “How do some people get so good at sports?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Jay! Now you might all know how much I love science, but did you know that I also absolutely love sports? Whether it's competing in events like American Ninja Warrior or just watching sports like basketball or gymnastics on TV, it's so fun seeing the best athletes in the world compete, like Sky Brown. Sky hopped on a skateboard for the first time when she was three years old. And she kept it up until she became one of the greatest skaters in the world. This is her winning a bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics when she was only 13! So cool! Someone named Elena loves sports too and has a question. Let's give Elena a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Jay!

- Hi, Elena!

- I have a question for you. How do some people get so good at sports?

- Ooh, that's a great question.

- Lloyd with Morgan streaking! She's trimming the goalkeeper! Off the post and in!

Whether it's soccer or basketball or skating like Sky, the world's best athletes can do some pretty incredible things. Like flying through the air to dunk over someone's head, or hitting a home run.

- Wow!

That actually goes out of the stadium. Or doing two backflips while twisting around at the same time. No way! How do athletes even do things like that? I mean, they almost seem like superheroes. Before I go on, I'm curious, how do you think some people get so good at their sport?

VIDEO 2

It's tempting to think that the best athletes are just born great like they just go out on a playing field when they're kids and magically know how to score goals or sink baskets or do triple flips. And sure, some people have traits like being really tall that are definitely helpful in some sports. But even with those advantages, those people aren't just automatically good at sports. Being great at something doesn't really work that way. Just ask Sky Brown. Even though she's a skateboarder, she gets up at five each morning to practice surfing for four hours. That helps with her balancing skills. Then after school, she practices her skateboarding tricks over and over and over again for another four hours. Whoa, that's a lot of practice! Why in the world does she do that? Because it works. Practicing the right way and doing something over and over to get better at something, like skateboard tricks or shooting baskets, is one of the many ways to get good. You may have noticed this when you were learning to write your name for the first time. At first, I bet it was pretty slow. But after doing it over and over and over every day, you probably got a lot quicker. Now you might even be able to write your name without really thinking about it, and



that's how practice works. It trains your brain to do something automatically. And in sports, that's super important. When a teammate passes the ball to a player in a basketball game, they don't have time to think, "Hmm, now, what did my coach say was the best way to shoot the basketball?" They just have to shoot automatically. And the only way a player learns how to do that is by shooting thousands and thousands of baskets during practice. Okay, so does that mean that anyone that practices enough can be in the Olympics or play in a top league like the NBA? Well, not quite. A lot of athletes practice, but they don't all become great. There's something else that makes athletes good at what they do. Curiosity. This is Simone Biles. When Simone was six, her daycare class took a field trip to an air-conditioned gym because it was too hot to play outside. But instead of hanging out with her friends, Simone spent the whole day watching a gymnastics team that was practicing there. She was curious about everything they did. She listened to their coaches and watched every move they made. She even tried to copy the cartwheels they were doing. When she got home, she signed up for gymnastics classes, read books, watched videos, and learned all she could. And after years of working hard and staying curious, Simone became one of the best gymnasts in the world. She even won five medals at the 2016 Olympics. Wow! So besides just practicing, athletes like Simone Biles never stop being curious about their sport and learning new things. They're curious to learn more when things are going right, and they're curious to learn more when things are going wrong. Ouch! Snowboarder Lindsey Jacobellis was seconds away from winning a gold medal at the 2006 Winter Olympics, but she decided to do a trick on the last hill and crashed right before the finish line.

- Oh! Drama! Jacobellis is down! Oh, look at her! This is incredible! Frieden! Frieden!



Such a bummer. Lindsey was so disappointed after that race. She even felt like giving up sometimes. But she loved her sport so much that she decided not to. Instead, she learned from her mistake and stayed curious, and kept on learning everything she could. And 16 years later, she finally got a chance to race for the gold again.

- Lindsey Jacobellis, she's down off the jump. Lindsey Jacobellis will claim the gold medal!

And this time she won. Lindsey's story reminds us that learning to be good at something can be pretty frustrating. Think about it. Every baseball player strikes out. Every Olympian has mess-ups. And even the greatest basketball players know what it's like to miss a game-winning shot. But the best athletes love their sport so much that they don't give up. They keep learning and practicing even when they're disappointed. And they stay curious about what they did right and what they did wrong. And do you know what? Practicing hard and staying curious and not giving up when things are going wrong doesn't just work for athletes. It can work for anyone. I'm serious. We may not all become top athletes, but whether you're learning how to read, or ride a bike, or draw better, the things that make some people great at sports can help us become better at almost anything. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Elena, for asking it!