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Bounce: The Myth Of Talent And The Power Of Practice

'A must-read for anyone who believes hardwork will achieve success'
Duncan Bannatyne



Matthew Syed
Bounce
The myth of talent
and the power of practice



Synopsis

Essential reading following an astounding summer of sport; if you've ever wondered what makes a champion, Bounce has the answer. This edition does not include illustrations. What are the real secrets of sporting success, and what lessons do they offer about life? Why doesn't Tiger Woods choke? Why are the best figure skaters those that have fallen over the most and why has one small street in Reading produced more top table tennis players than the rest of the country put together. Two-time Olympian and sports writer and broadcaster Matthew Syed draws on the latest in neuroscience and psychology to uncover the secrets of our top athletes and introduces us to an extraordinary cast of characters, including the East German athlete who became a man, and her husband and the three Hungarian sisters who are all chess grandmasters. Bounce is crammed with fascinating stories and statistics. Looking at controversial questions such as whether talent is more important than practice, drugs in sport (and life) and whether black people really are faster runners, the mind-bending Bounce is a must-read for the hardened sports nut or brand new convert.

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Customer Reviews

As you probably already know, the main message/goal of Matthew Syed's book *Bounce* is to discredit the established notion that success in highly complex tasks (athletics in this case) is entirely due to innate ability. Instead, he argues, it is thousands of hours of purposeful, challenging practice and determination to improve that create the superior skill observed in top athletes, chess players and professionals in other fields. Syed writes in a conversational tone that is very engaging and easy to follow. He does a decent job articulating his arguments and uses scientific evidence, personal experience as a table tennis Olympian and anecdotes from famous athletes to back up his claims. Additionally, this book has plenty of good insight, for example: the amount of practice it takes on average to acquire a high level of skill in a particular activity; the difference between regular practice and purposeful practice; why certain races are falsely perceived to be "naturally" good at certain sports; how children respond when they are rewarded for talent vs. hard work; the physiology of choking during a performance and many others. Despite the good stuff, certain parts of the book were not entirely convincing. Here is an example. Rationally, it's not too hard to buy into the idea that hard work and talent breed excellence. The problem is that this still doesn't quite explain what makes those people that start mastering a skill at a very early age gravitate towards say soccer ball vs. violin. Or why some children who are as young as two (before any meaningful parental intervention) enjoy being challenged and thrive on practicing a skill, while others shy away from it. Another interesting notion that is not discussed in this book is the speed of learning.

Matthew Syed's *Bounce* has an interesting thesis. In the vein of Gladwell's *Outliers: The Story of Success* and Colvin's *Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else*, Syed attempts to argue against the idea of 'raw talent.' A former table-tennis champion, Syed wants to show us that excellence - particularly of the sporting and artistic variety - is a better predictor of success than innate talent. Syed presents three lines of data to bolster his argument: personal anecdote from his sporting days, knowledge he has gained about athletes and their backgrounds he has gained from being a sports writer, and summaries of studies done by psychologists (many of the same ones appearing in the two above-cited books). The first chapter is largely Syed's retelling of his own ascent to the top of table-tennis, where he points out that the fact that his town produced quite a few table-tennis stars is enough to at least call into question the 'talent myth.' Later, he goes into some histories of great artists and sports stars - Mozart, Federer, the Williams sisters, Tiger Woods, the chess champion Polgar sisters - to show that it was not so much raw talent, but extraordinary dedication and deep practice that helped them succeed. By way of studies, Syed cites several by psychologist K. Anders Ericsson whose work suggests that the

difference between 'good' and 'great' is better predicted by practice than most any other factor.

This is a good book, but not a great one. It has many good ideas within it, and it also does a good job of demolishing some old icons. It is a work of synthesis and it is honest enough to acknowledge the influence of many other books including Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else and Outliers: The Story of Success As I had already read these two books I found the ideas in Bounce familiar. Its main failing is the lack of a summary chapter at the end bringing the book to a conclusion. It just ends. Bounce is superb at demolishing the ideas of "innate talents" and "genetic endowments and "racial characteristics." Syed points out the combinations of factors that come together to allow top performance to emerge. It is usually some combination of focused and genuine enthusiasm, opportunity, certain local quirks; disciplined practice and well trained experience. The initial enthusiasm for a task has to come from within- which allows the learner to put up with the knocks and setbacks on the way to becoming good at something. He explains very well why parents can try pushing their children into something...but probably won't get great results by so doing. The proverb about leading the horse to water, but not being able to get them to drink comes to mind. This leaves open an obvious niche for a book that helps parents to recognise and go with their child's talents and abilities.

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