

Shaping Talent
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SILVER MEDALIST IN THE ZONE



GRANVILLE, OHIO – It was 2002. Salt Lake City. Granville’s Leanne Parsley won the silver medal in the women’s skeleton at the Winter Olympics.

She was even chosen as one of eight athletes to carry an American flag rescued from the devastated World Trade Center into the opening ceremony.

She was, without question, a highly respected Olympian.

“My individual success as an Olympic athlete was great,” she recalled. “But it was our team’s success on that day that made it even more special. And that team included the coaches, support staff and loved ones who supported us along the way.”

“The shared experience of working hard and reaching your goals is very different than when you’re competing as an individual,” she added. “That can be rewarding too. But there is just something about being successful as a team.”

Leanne Parsley grew up in Granville, with fond memories of playing on the town’s recreational teams.

“It wasn’t about winning back then,” she said. “It was about

having fun, making friends and learning new things.”

After graduating from Granville High School, Parsley won a scholarship to Marshall University for both basketball and track and field. As a basketball player, she was one of only 14 female players in school history to score more than 1,000 points. In track and field, she was a standout in both high jump and javelin. She held the school record in the javelin.

For her efforts, she was twice named the Marshall University Female Athlete of the Year. In 2002, she was inducted into the school’s athletic hall of fame.

“I think my biggest obstacle turned out to be my biggest blessing, and that was lack of talent,” she conceded. “I was never the fastest or strongest or most gifted person on any team I played on, but I knew that. And I knew the only way to overcome it was to be the hardest working person on the team. I had just enough talent to keep me in the mix, but it was my effort that helped me rise above those more gifted than myself.”

“I think the greatest moments in sport,” she continued, “are often those moments when an athlete’s hard work collides with a key moment in competition, and the explosion is poetry in motion. Think of the 3-point buzzer beater to win a championship title – swoosh! How about the perfect full extension of a home run swing that wins a series title – crack! Those moments aren’t a fluke. They are the sweet culmination of hour after hour after hour of drill work. That’s what I liked. I liked chasing those moments of being in the zone almost as much as I enjoyed being in the zone.”

“I logged countless hours of instruction and repetitive drills until each skill became second nature. The goal was to know those skills so well that on game day I didn’t have to think about how to shoot a proper jump shot, I just did it. On race day, I didn’t have to think about how to steer through the difficult sections of a bobsleigh track. My body was just ready to react to whatever the track would give me that day.”

“When you master a skill through that kind of repetitive hard work, your body performs it just like breathing. You don’t think about it, you just do it. And if you’re lucky, it happens during the heat of competition. I think that’s what being in the zone is all about. And it’s glorious to watch and heaven to experience personally.”





“I think the athletes who are most successful are those who find satisfaction in that process. They love game day, but they also find enjoyment in the day-to-day training as well. A lot of kids today don’t want to do that kind of hard work. They don’t want to practice. They just want to play on game day.”

“I don’t think it works that way,” she concluded, “if you want to reach your full potential, which I think should be the goal of every athlete. As my Olympic coach told me, ‘Forget about winning. If you put in that kind of effort, the rest will take care of itself. And even if you don’t win the race, you’ll have the satisfaction of having competed to the best of your ability.’”

Shaping Talent focuses on the influences that lead athletes to succeed. The people who helped them. Their work ethic. How and why they turned something they like into something they do. In other words, how God shaped their growth. If you have a suggestion for a future profile, contact Rye D’Orazio at Central Ohio Fellowship of Christian Athletes at 614-682-6551 or email rdorazio@fca.org.