



Photo: Julia Evans

THE MENTAL LIMITATION GAME

- is it all in your mind?

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So many of us battle with the idea that the goals we set for ourselves aren't really achievable. We trick ourselves into thinking that we're limited by the big things, limited by the small things or limited by everything. I don't have the time, I don't have the money or I don't have the ambition. In reality, this game we play is rather simple: we're constantly fighting our mind. When stacked against the odds in the mental boxing ring, so much of the time we back down to a winner that seems undefeatable - but if we aren't ever going to use the right techniques, we're never going to win. By this, I mean ambition and drive, probably two words you've had drilled into your brain by countless family members, friends, mentors or TED talk speakers over the years. You might be fed up with the notion of pushing yourself to accomplish your most daring and desired goals, but how are you really perceiving them? What in reality is stopping you? We want you to twist your perspective and take a look at the mental game the true heroes are playing because every single time they play, they're there to win.

Handcyclist and para-sport activist Rowena Webb leads a life far from the norm. Lifestyle complications have left her pushing the greatest mental boundaries every second she spends alive. After the diagnosis of diabetes followed by significant lifestyle complications with drinking, drugs and lack of self-care, Rowena lost both her legs in her thirties.

Photo: Caitlin Bowes



Her amputation process began in 2011 with the loss of her right leg. In 2015, after major blood clotting in her left leg contributed to sporadic heart failure and a resulting coma, the decision to amputate her remaining leg was agreed upon by her doctors at Vincent Pallotti. When describing how she adjusted to her new-found disability, she broke it down into three broad categories: faith, effort and sport. She elaborated by emphasising that leaving your care entirely up to anyone else won't get you anywhere. Putting in the effort, time and drive is something anyone can do for a double amputee it's ten times harder, but it's achievable.

Photo: Caitlin Bowes



As a dedicated and successful handcyclist, gym bunny and executive property finance consultant, she plays with her mind on a daily basis but has broken every single psychological barrier she's been presented with. She considers her disability her emancipation from a previous life in which she had completely lost sight of who she was.

Living her day-to-day on dialysis, in a wheelchair and confronting the physical pain still very real and raw for her, this woman has achieved what anyone else would've deemed impossible. After releasing her book *Impossible is Nothing* in 2018, an account of her life and experiences, she wakes up every single day striving to embrace both the beauty and the challenges in her life.

She's no stranger to the gym, engaging in physical strength training, muscle toning, upper body ergo work and to top it off, she even fits in some time to meditate. This inspiring para-athlete doesn't stop there. She plans on participating in the Argus next year alongside thousands of able-bodied cyclists to prove not just to herself, but every other able-bodied and disabled individual out there that you are only bound to failure by your mind. This superwoman has set sky rocketing standards for herself by aiming to cycle 21km in George at the OCC festival for para-athletes next year.

Although Rowena strongly advocates for the need to have many more events catering for para-athletes and disabled individuals in South Africa, she stresses the importance of taking every opportunity presented in life and doing the absolute best that you can with the cards you've been dealt.

Photo: Craig Stirton



Raylen De Wee, like Rowena, is an amputee. On the face of it, that is where the commonalities end. Rowena is a double-leg amputee while Raylen lost his arm at the tender age of 12. Webb received the best that South African private healthcare has to offer. De Wee, meanwhile, was laid up in Kimberley Hospital and Red Cross for the better part of 15 months. Yet what the pair have in common beyond physical parameters is unbelievable mental strength and an admirable willingness to confront head-on, the mental challenges of life as an amputee.

Put mildly, Raylen was in the wrong place at the wrong time one winter's evening in 2010. While making his way home after a game of soccer with friends, a particularly poorly-lit area prevented De Wee from seeing a powerline dangling in front of him. One misdirected kick of the soccer ball later and De Wee lost consciousness as 33 000 volts of electricity surged through his body. The months which followed would be the litmus test of De Wee's resolve. 15 months confined to hospital beds at both Kimberley and Red Cross would be enough to break any child's spirit. Raylen underwent seventeen operations to repair the severe damage to his remaining arm, feet and stomach.

Even after finally being discharged from Red Cross in 2011, De Wee had a few mental challenges to overcome. As if adapting to life as an amputee wasn't enough, De Wee had the added challenge of adjusting to life in Cape Town, 650 kilometres away from his Northern Cape hometown of Carnarvon. De Wee however, pushed through his boundaries of fragility largely due to the rekindling of a childhood hobby: golf. Having caught the eye of the South African Disabled Golf Association while at Astra School (a school for physically disabled students) in Montana, Raylen joined the association's First Swing Program.

His introduction to the game was frustrating to begin with as his fellow SADGA competitors hit the ball a long way further than him. For any golfer, disabled or not - having your friends often hit the ball further than you is no fun at all. Having only one arm additionally affects one's balance especially when swinging a golf club in the wind- the game becomes immensely challenging. Nonetheless Raylen refused to lose heart and hope. De Wee's physical disadvantage on the course however, extends beyond just having a single arm as his source of power.

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His feet - the outlet through which the electricity exited his body during the electrocution are so badly damaged that he has to wear two pairs of socks almost all of the time. Such challenges make a round of golf particularly arduous for De Wee. Nevertheless, he takes such obstacles in his stride and exhibits an amazing temperament as SADGA Operations Manager Lily Reich explains. "He's very positive and very accepting of his disability, he's an incredible human being and he's going to do well," comments Reich.



Photo: Julia Evans

After making his debut at the SA Disabled Golf Open in 2014, De Wee took top honours in the Stableford category for arm-amputees with repeated success over the next three consecutive years. A decade on from his accident Raylen is thriving. He has completed SADGA's five-tiered First Swing Program and today owns a handicap of 11.4. To put into perspective how impressive this is, the average golfer in South Africa has a handicap of 16.1 as proposed by Handicaps Network Africa. Such rapid improvement does not come without one possessing an insatiable hunger and will to succeed.

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As his profile in South African disabled golf rises with each passing year, so the whispers have grown in number- South Africa may have its next World One-Arm champion in the making. Raylen himself though is under no illusion about what it will take for him to reach the summit of the one-arm game. "I must practice harder and mustn't give up," he says. There is something about De Wee however, which suggests that giving up just isn't on his mental deck of cards.

Our next sporting superstar opened up to us about living life with Cerebral Palsy, a condition that affects muscle tone and limits specific body movement. Nikki Kemp is more than a dedicated runner. In the last 5 months she has gone from repetitive trial and error in the beginning of her venture to recently completing the Cape Town-based John Korasie 30km race. Nikki and her twin sister were born 3 months premature and following crucial head scan complications at 5 months, Nikki's life changed forever.

Their parents would be given the news that the girls had advanced stage hydrocephalus; the doctors immediately put shunts in but the damage had already been done. The official condition is called hemiplegia, Nikki is a left side hemi, her sister a right side hemi.

Growing up, Kemp didn't like therapy because she didn't understand why she had to do it. No one wants to seem different when they are a child, so having obvious physical distinctions to her peers like the splints she had to wear on her legs was tremendously difficult for her. "You don't want to be seen like that," she remarks.

Throughout most of her life Nikki was angry at the world. She felt lost, depressed and angry, trapped in a bubble of self-pity and self-deprecation.



Photos: Caitlin Bowes

Finding faith, however, put things into perspective for Kemp and helped her arrive at an important realisation. "There were so many people that were worse off than me and still are you know and yet I couldn't see past that," Kemp admits. Another big motivating factor for Kemp has been and still to this day, is proving people wrong. "When someone says you can't do something I'm like watch me! Watch me do it." she exclaims.

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When she was younger she played competitive tennis. When she first started, her coach told her that she could toss the ball up with her right hand (instead of her left hand as most players do) while holding the racquet. Nikki refused to be treated any differently to her competitors, she wanted to play the game like any other able-bodied player would.

She revealed that even though it may take her ten times longer than the average person to master her sport, she'll pursue any challenge presented to her. In 2006 when Nikki was 16 she was chosen to represent her province in the South African Junior Tennis Masters.

She emphasises that telling someone with a disability that they can't succeed in any given sport will just make them want to prove you wrong.

Sport not only positively impacted her physically but aided her re-integration into society too. "I'll be honest with you, re-integrating into society happened when I started to accept that I had... well have a disability," says Kemp.

When she stopped engaging in sport, her physical and mental health rapidly deteriorated. Reaching her tipping point as an adult, she realised something needed to change. She reached out for guidance from the Sports Science Institute of South Africa located in Cape Town.

It was here that she first encountered the Walking with Brandon foundation - a foundation that helps people with disabilities and brain injuries start running. She has conquered countless mental and physical feats since her decision to get involved with the foundation and plans on completing her first ultra-marathon come 2020.

Her message to anyone struggling to accept themselves, disabled or not, is to focus on their own mental competition. At the end of the day, you're only in competition with your mind. "You've just got to realise everyone's running their own race so focus on running yours," advises Kemp.

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What these three exceptional human beings share is an unbreakable spirit and a refusal to let life get the better of them. The severity of their disabilities may differ greatly but all three have a burning desire to excel in their chosen discipline, consistently inspiring those around them. Whatever it is you want most in life, it's important to realise that nothing is beyond your reach.