



Guest

Viren Rasquinha is a former captain of India's national field hockey team. He quit international hockey to pursue an MBA at ISB and since 2009, he has been the CEO of Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) - a Not for Profit company dedicated towards helping Indian athletes win Olympic Gold medals. They have played a key role in 5 out of the 8 medals India won in 2012 and 2016 Olympics. We spoke about his reflections from his personal journey and from his experiences around spotting and grooming potential at OGQ. For more details on Viren, please visit - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viren_Rasquinha.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 8th conversation at the Play to Potential podcast series. My guest this time is Viren Rasquinha, a former captain of the Indian field hockey team. He quit hockey when he was in his prime and went to ISB to pursue his MBA. After completing his MBA, he joined the Olympic Gold Quest in 2009 and has been their CEO since. OGQ has played a key role in five out of the eight medals India has won in the last two Olympics at London and in Rio. In our conversation we spoke about a range of topics including how he thought about his career and transitions in different points in time, how they pick Olympic gold medallists of the future at OGQ and what they do to cultivate these sportsmen to go and perform at the biggest stage. Without further ado, over to the conversation.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Maybe a good place to start is the Olympic Gold Quest, the organization where you are the CEO. What is OGQ and more specifically, how could people contribute to OGQ?

Viren Rasquinha (VR): Olympic Gold Quest is a not-for-profit organization. It was founded by two of our sports legends, Geet Sethi and Prakash Padukone, who need no introduction. The mission of OGQ is a very sharp one: it is to help Indian athletes win Olympic gold medals. We are very proud to say that in the last two Olympics, at London 2012 and Rio 2016, five out of the eight medal winners for India which is Gagan Narang, Vijay Kumar, MC Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal, and now this time in Rio, PV Sindhu their training was supported by Olympic Gold Quest. And when I say the training was supported by OGQ, this is in terms of helping provide the best coaches for them, the best training facilities for them, ensuring they have the best equipment. We have put together a team of world class doctors, physios, nutritionists, mental trainers, everything in the back-end to ensure that these athletes have the best possible support. Because if we expect our athletes to win Olympic medals, everyone working behind the scenes also needs to be world class. We can't expect Mary Kom to win

an Olympic medal with an average coach or average physio. So, everyone needs to perform their role to the best of their ability, everyone needs to be the best at what they do. And that's part of the journey to helping us winning Olympic medals.

It's not that it is not happening currently, but there's scope to do much better. OGQ supports some of the best young talent in the country. Currently, we support the training and preparation of 93 athletes across eight different individual Olympic sports. These sports are badminton, boxing, shooting, athletics, archery, wrestling, swimming, and table tennis. These are the sports that we have identified where India has the potential to win Olympic medals. When resources are limited, generally, you must create priorities. So, looking at historical data, our relative strengths and weaknesses against the best in the world, sports where we have the best talent and potential, that's how we have narrowed down on these sports. Out of those 93 athletes, around 42 are senior athletes, 20 years and above, who are preparing for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Around 51 are junior athletes, 19 years and below, who we are grooming for 2024 and 2028 Olympics. So, there are short-term plans, now for Tokyo 2020, as well as long-term plans for eight years and 12 years for the remaining Olympics. Incidentally, the youngest athlete we support is an eight-year-old girl; she plays badminton.

DJ: Any thoughts on how people could think of being a part of this journey with you?

VR: I wanted to mention one more point. Even PV Sindhu, who won the Olympic silver medal this time, not many people knows that OGQ has been supporting her training since the time she was 14 years old. In fact, when she was 15 years old, Olympic Gold Quest had sent her for five international tournaments. At that time, she wasn't in the Indian team. Her parents could not afford to send her for international tournaments. That time, we incurred the expenditure of almost 15 lakhs to send her for the tournaments with her coach or her parent or her physio, etcetera. So, we have been supporting her since then. The journey with Sindhu, to win an Olympic medal, was seven long years. That's what makes it really fulfilling, to be a part of the journey. Generally, in sport, people only see the final destination, but the journey is something that has given us a lot of pride and pleasure.

We would love for more and more people to be a part of this journey. As I said, Olympic Gold Quest is a not-for-profit organization. We raise funds only through donations. Currently, many companies as well as HNIs support us. So, we have both the 50% tax deduction as well as 100% tax-deduction certificates. We are CSR-compliant, so companies support us through CSR as well. We also have many individuals supporting us with donations as little as 500 or 1,000 rupees. The eventual dream is for the masses to support an organization like OGQ. I think, every contribution counts. We believe that sport is something that cuts across all barriers. If you watched Sindhu's final at Rio, you would have felt proud on TV as an Indian that an Indian athlete is toe-to-toe with the best in the world. We want people to contribute towards that and make a difference. Very often, people want to support sport but they do not know how to. OGQ wants to be that platform where people can support and we can ensure that the support goes towards an organization that is credible, that is accountable, and that is transparent and showing impact. As I said, we look after the training of the best of the best young talent in the country. These are the talented athletes who can potentially eight, 10 years down the line; go on to win Olympic medals for India. We want a million people to be a part of that journey.

DJ: To make it tactical, what's the easiest way for people to contribute? Is there a website?

VR: Our website is olympicgoldquest.in and you can log on to our website, simply click on 'Donate Now' and you can make an online donation via credit card, debit card, NEFT, whatever mode you

prefer. So, there are three options for donating. It's as simple as that. It'll take a maximum of two minutes to do that.

DJ: To rewind the clock, I want to talk about your journey. A lot of people, especially with income challenges, might end up picking the safe option and going to academics to ensure at least they have the base case covered. What's been your journey through that phase and what's the advice you give to people who are at those crossroads where they have to make a choice between committing to sport versus playing it safe?

VR: In India, traditionally, when you come to tenth standard or twelfth standard, you always have to make a choice in life. And I came from a background where exactly you had to make that choice, because my mom was a doctor and dad was an engineer. Two elder brothers were computer engineers. I didn't come from a background of my family playing sport. My family was sports loving, but they didn't play sport competitively. In fact, I, myself, also was on the Mumbai merit list in SSC. At that point of time, in all honesty, I didn't understand a single scientific equation. I saw my mother's big medical books and I saw my brothers' even bigger engineering books, and I thought, you know, that's not for me. So, when I was in tenth standard, while the world and its uncle wanted me to study and become a doctor or an engineer, all I wanted to do was play hockey. Coincidentally, when I was 27 years old and I retired and I eventually retired from the sport very early, possibly, before my time the world and its uncle wanted me to play for another four years, while I wanted to study. So, things reversed 12 years later.

It's just something about me following my heart always. And I have to admit here that I was very lucky, because like all parents, my parents were very strict with my eldest brother, so he had to do engineering. Second guy, OK, but he went into that line as well. And, I think, they were just not bothered about me, so I was lucky enough that I could do whatever I wanted. Having said that, I think, for some reason, I don't know why, but I just always backed myself and I just made one decision that since playing hockey was my choice, I wouldn't take a single penny from my parents to play the game. When I was out of tenth standard, I was taken by Tata Sports Club hockey team on a contract, when I was in eleventh standard. I used to get a princely sum of 2,000 rupees which was a huge amount at that point of time. And when I was going to junior college, I was the only one from all my friends who was earning 2,000 rupees, big sum of money back then as pocket money. So, one thing just leads to the other and I ended up here.

I can say that I have never been someone who has thought long term and I never thought that I would go on to play for India or I would captain. I dreamt of that, but with young kids, you want to dream about something but you don't actually believe at that point of time that it will happen, it will actually happen. So, I never looked at it as a career then. I just love playing hockey. I love playing sport. And now, I know that I just want to be in sport. Sport is what I know best. Sport is what I love best. I mean, here at OGQ, every single day that I'm at work, I love what I do. And there's not been a single morning that I can remember where I say, oh god, I don't want to go to work and I am not enjoying this and it's painful. So, for me, as long as I am dealing with sport, I am really very happy.

DJ: In your journey, you were part of the Indian team and then you went on to captain the Indian team in hockey. What's that delta from being a good player to being a good captain? What are some of the skills, muscles that need to be built, to make that jump?

VR: One is, you have to have certain skillsets that win you the respect of your team. So, playing, you don't necessarily need to be the best player in the team, but you need to be the best in your role. So, in a cricket team, you can't have 11 guys who are good batsmen. There is a balance that needs to be brought to a team. You need good batsmen and good bowlers and good all-rounders and a

wicketkeeper, etcetera. Same with hockey. I was a defensive midfielder. In my 180 matches, I never scored a single goal for India, but I was the best in my role as a defensive midfielder. I think, that's important, that your role in the team should be well defined, you should be the best, and your skillset should win you their respect.

I think, it really helps if your communication is good with the team, both one-on-one as well as with the entire team as a whole. I think, third, it's important to be fair to everyone. And last, but not the least, I would say, it's important for the captain to lead by example. So, if it's pushing yourself in training every single day, pushing the team and going through the hard grind every single day, every single team meeting, every single training session, every single match. That's something that came very naturally to me. I have always been extremely determined and push myself every single day. I will not be happy if I give anything less than 100% in whatever I do. So, I do few things, but I make sure that I do it really well. So, I think, for me, again, I have been lucky that I have always got along with everyone. I love being around people. I hate doing anything in isolation. I don't care if I am the team leader or not, but I just love to be part of a team.

DJ: What differentiates the great captains from the good captains? Where is the edge that some captains have, who sort of go on to become really legendary?

VR: I think, it's just about your personal rapport and inspiration. And, I think, that's what I said about you have to be good not just with one-on-one with an individual, but with getting the best out of an individual as well as the team as a whole. Because finally, the team needs to be better or bigger than the sum of its parts. You don't need the big names and the big stars in the team always. And you must understand that everyone cannot be the star in the team. There might be one, two, or three of them in a team of 16, but when you bring that entire team together, the final output should be more than the sum of the individuals. It's a skillset of the captain and the coach to bring out that best, to inspire them. It's about dealing with people and individuals, and we must remember that every individual is different. So, you might need to give *gaalis* to one guy or you might need to put an arm around the shoulder of another guy, but, I think, understanding the mentality and the attitude of people is something that's very important.

DJ: You alluded to betting on people over a long timeframe. How do you spot potential? How do you look for that spark for you to say I will invest behind this person? How do you really pick them?

VR: So, a combination of factors really. One is quantitative factors. We have a full-fledged research team that would be researching into quantitative results over the last two to three years of the athlete. So, what are the kinds of results? What age is the athlete? What are the best in the world doing? What were they doing when they were that age? Also, we need to understand what kind of coaching, support, equipment, etcetera, and the athlete had. So, for an archer, if the archer didn't have the right kind of equipment, he or she is not going to get the same kind of results, if they didn't have a proper technical coach supporting him or her, again, it would be difficult to get those results. So, we try to bring together all these factors.

We would also see qualitative factors, the discipline of the player, and the commitment of the player. For me, a very important quality is the hunger and desire to be the best in the world and not just being happy with being national champion or Commonwealth Games champion. We want our athletes to dream and have the desire to be the best in the world. And for that, we need to gauge whether they are ready to run through a brick wall for you every single day in training.

DJ: And you said one of your players is an eight year old, the youngest player. So, how do you smell this in somebody so young?

VR: It's hard to pinpoint, because if someone is that young, there's very little research data available to us, because the data points are very little. She's hardly played tournaments. She's not had any international exposure. We are talking about exceptional talent. When Sindhu was 11, she was already beating 15-year-olds. This young kid is eight years old, but she is already beating 11 and 12-year-olds. And you must remember that at a young age, every six months plays a major difference to your progress, especially physically.

DJ: Eight versus 11 is a much bigger deal than 11 versus 14.

VR: Even an eight versus eight-and-a-half-year-old is a big difference. So, you can imagine between an eight and an 11-year-old. So, that's one thing.

Also, I think, to a large extent, you go by gut. I never ignore gut instinct about a player. Actually, science cannot explain that as such, but it's something that you balance out. And I am happy to take risks. It's important. What we say is that it's important to get the talented people under our umbrella and create good habits in them. When I say good habits, I am not talking about ensuring that they don't drink or smoke or things like that, but good habits in terms of training and following the right procedures, right systems. We want to create the right ecosystem which is conducive to excellence and not a system that is conducive to mediocrity and average performances. If we get that ecosystem right, over a period of time, that ecosystem will produce results. So, maybe when Sindhu was a 14-year-old, there were other girls who were better than her, but the system will ensure that the best player in the long run will eventually come up. So, we try to develop systems. We might make mistakes here or there, but in general, if someone is super talented, OGQ wants to be supporting them.

DJ: You retired at the peak of your game. You alluded to the fact that when people wanted you to study, you wanted to play, and when people wanted you to play, you wanted to move on to study. So, give us a sense of how you took stock of life at that point in time.

VR: Again, as I said, I came from a background where studies were important to me. It's not that because I chose sport initially, I did not want to study. It was always something that was important to me. I came from a background where studies were important. I think, post-graduation, from 21 till I was 28, I was so busy training, playing, traveling with the Indian team; I honestly did not touch a book for seven years. So, I always knew that I wanted to study and I wanted to do my MBA. I just didn't know when the right time was. I always knew that once I retired, I would do my MBA. So, that decision was clear in my mind. When I was 26–27, at that point of time, it had been almost eight–nine years in the Indian team. I was getting a little bit frustrated, because the travel, the load, the pressure was a lot. I was getting little bit frustrated with selection issues, with selectors, with injuries that I was having. And I felt at that point of time, maybe I was not enjoying myself as much as I should have been. That set me thinking. If I am not enjoying something at the highest, then I have no right to be there and if I am not feeling that I can give 200% every single day in training, then maybe I need to think about my future. So, that's what got me thinking. I went to ISB to do my MBA eventually.

DJ: Was that the first batch around that time?

VR: No, the first batch was in 2001. I went in the class of 2009, so much later. Incidentally, in 2003, at the Afro-Asian Games in Hyderabad, where India won and we had beaten Pakistan in the final, the Indian team was put up at ISB. So, that's how I came to know about ISB. I was impressed with the infrastructure, with the campus, with the curriculum, with the place. I had known about ISB since then. When I was planning on retiring and thinking about what to do, I knew that I always wanted to

be in India. Hockey gave me the chance to go across the world and travel everywhere, but, for me, I've always wanted to be in India and make a difference over here. I didn't see myself studying for two years and doing an MBA abroad. I didn't have that much money to study abroad for two years. So, I thought, ISB one-year course, top-class curriculum, top-class peer group, great faculty, great infrastructure, everything. It made good sense for me. I started studying for my GMAT simultaneously, when I was playing. I did shit in the first one. I did really well in the second one, and I applied to ISB. Once I got in, I decided this is the right time for me to announce my retirement.

DJ: How did OGQ come about, post ISB? Give us an insight into how you took stock of the various forks ahead of you and how was OGQ born?

VR: Life just throws a few things in your path and you don't plan for it. I never planned for OGQ and I never knew about OGQ throughout my ISB career. So, I finished ISB in 2009. OGQ was actually incorporated in 2001. Nothing was done at all. There were no funds, no athletes, nothing. Neeraj Bhardwaj, who was on the board of directors of OGQ, also happens to be on the board of ISB. He was one of the founding members of ISB. So, he had just given me a call and told me that we have this organization called OGQ, and I had no clue and I actually put the phone down on him. At that time, in 2008–9, was the economic slump, post-Lehman chaos, and the Satyam scandal, and the dean of ISB was on the chair of Satyam. No one was getting jobs and everyone was tense. How do you pay off your education loans? I was not interested in talking to a not-for-profit and that sort of thing. So, that's when I first heard about OGQ.

I got a campus placement, a pretty decent package, and I was happy about that. ISB got over in April 2009. I was supposed to start in June 2009, in Delhi, conventional corporate world. I would have been sitting on Excel sheets throughout. And when I came back, the first day, I happened to meet Geet and Prakash, and they told me there is this nice organization called OGQ and they had co-founded it and they were looking for a CEO. I told them that I had an offer, so right now I am not really looking out. But it actually interested me because one, Geet and Prakash were asking me. In the sporting world, it's two legends asking you, people of the highest achievement, calibre, credibility. I studied a little bit about OGQ. The board was extremely credible. I thought the idea was good, the platform was good.

But what really made the choice for me was, for me, there was a dream as a player to win an Olympic medal, which I could not win even when I played the Athens 2004 Olympics. And I remember at that time being very frustrated, because there were so many mistakes in the Indian system, the way we prepared for major competitions. And I had always promised myself that one day, if I got the opportunity, maybe I would do things differently and I would do things better. So, it sort of all came together at the right time. That's how it happened. At that time, OGQ had one athlete, Gagan Narang, and there was actually 10 lakhs in the bank. Again, people thought that I was mad. So, history repeated itself. When I was in tenth standard, they thought I was mad. When I quit hockey, again, people thought I was mad. And when I was taking a not-for-profit after I had a huge education loan, again they thought I was mad. So, now, I am getting, sort of, used to it. As I said, I have always followed my heart, followed what I thought was best, and I have been lucky enough that my parents have never interfered and they have always trusted me.

DJ: If you were to reflect on some of these transitions you've been through, what are the two–three themes that come up that you want to share with the broader universe of people going through their careers, in terms of how they should think about what next?

VR: I think, it's a great question. Obviously, people are generally very confused in lives about what to do, what to do next, and when to do. To be honest, I was confused as well. I was scared, because the

decision to make the transition from hockey to studies was very tough for me, because I thought I am going to go to school where IIT'ians are going to be coming and all that and can I match up to them. Will I be able to take the load of the course? But when I actually went into ISB, you realize that everyone has been in the corporate world for five years and everyone is scared and everyone is thinking can I manage. But when you just jump into the pool, you somehow learn to swim, even if it's against the tide. And that environment, it forces you to learn and forces you to fend for yourself. I realized that everyone had the fear. No one had touched a book for five years. So, that was one thing. You need to overcome that fear of change, and sometimes just take the plunge.

Number two is, if you've seen, I've always done what I loved and what I wanted to do and not what someone else wanted me to do. Third is, back yourself and then give it everything. That can't be compromised on. Sometimes you will fail. And I always say that I have failed many more times than I've won. But that's OK that will happen. You've just got to keep plugging away.

DJ: And back to OGQ, again, it's been a rewarding eight years. Now you have five out of eight medal winners in the last two Olympics thanks to OGQ. And you spoke about how you pick talent, right? Give us an insight into what are some of the themes that emerge in terms of how you support the talent. Again, I ask this in the context of grooming leaders in a company, right? And picking is a key element, you need to take the diamonds in the rough carefully, but if you had to really pick these, look at these five athletes who eventually went on to be on the podium at the Olympics, what are some of the themes that emerge in terms of a) player attributes, if there is any common themes, and b) anything about how the system came together to enable their success?

VR: Yeah, so, maybe couple of quick things on this is if you think about common elements there was no doubt that all of them were super talented in their respective sport that is number one. Number two is it's very, very clear to us that at Olympic level just plain raw talent is not enough. There are many factors that go into it and the Olympic medal winner cannot do it by himself or herself. They have to be surrounded by a superb team and that's what is with everyone in the corporate world. None of us work alone and we need to be surrounded with a good team. So, that's what we ensured at OGQ. Each one of these athletes was surrounded by a world-class team whether it was the physio or the trainer or the nutritionist or the coach or the guy who is booking their tickets. Everyone is performing his role to the best. And third is that athlete and the entire team give 100 percent every single day like I said for even if it's a team meeting, if it's a training session, if it's a match, you can't compromise on all these. If all these things are brought together your chances of winning are much more because right now Olympic medals are won and lost by very, very tiny margins.

DJ: True.

VR: And you need to ensure that your processes and systems are right. If those are right, chances of not succeeding are high even if one thing is out of place.

DJ: Got it.

VR: So, that's what would be the common element around all these athletes. All of them fiercely, fiercely determined. Like I say, they run through a wall every single day in training. Another element would be they are not afraid of losing, they are not afraid of an opponent; they just want to give it their all and that's the kind of athletes we want to back who have that fierce desire because there will be challenges, you will lose and you have got to learn the tough lessons from that defeat, ensure you don't repeat the same mistakes and actually make it happen when it really, really matters. Because again, in the real-world real match that opportunity comes once or twice and that time you

have to be ready, you have to be prepared and not back down and not be afraid, because if you are hesitant you will lose.

DJ: Any thoughts or lessons from the sports world on how that grit muscle can be built over time. Even when you look at the sportsmen, one is sort of the intrinsic that you can't change, but is there something that can be built over time, systematically? Have you seen coaches do that?

VR: I think the 'why' is very important for every person. What does it mean to that person? I have seen many super-talented athletes, but just the 'why' is not very clear to them. They are sort of drifting, and it's not very clear to them what is their dream, why are they doing what they are doing every single day in training. For me, the 'why' has always been very clear. I wanted to win an Olympic medal as a player and I was shattered when I couldn't win it for myself. Now, what drives me every single day is to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated for the next generation of players. So, yes, intrinsic, and, I think, building those good ecosystems motivate people to get better, whether it's the coach, as part of the ecosystem motivating the coach as well, motivating the support team around. So, all of them need to motivate the players and we need to ensure that the support team is also motivated. So, everyone is feeding off each other. As I said, it's building good ecosystems. Right now, in India, the ecosystem is lacking. The ecosystems right now are not conducive to excellence and we need to bring in the right [kind]. I always believe in good people. So, I have always been very careful in selecting the right people around my athletes.

DJ: And what's the delta when you move from being best in the country to being best in the world. What are the areas where, you know double click on the word excellence in that context for me, right?

VR: So again, sport is not really a rocket science and it's like what Germany does in hockey. If you see one on one, maybe they are not as skilful as Indian or Pakistani players. But again, some of their parts of the team are it's a superb team and that's because they do the simple things very, very well. The 95 percenters that they do is they keep it very simple, very basic, but they do that brilliantly, no one can touch them on the simple things like their passing, their trapping, their fitness, their speed, their nutrition, their video analysis. And that's far ahead of all the other teams so we might beat them on skill, but that does not take away that element from the game so even if they have taken it out of the equation so even if India does that better than them it's not enough to match that other gap. So, I think as far as possible we need to do the simple things well. Sometimes they forget to do the simple things well, keep the basics really strong, we are trying to do always the wonderful brilliant moves and we forget to actually stick to the basics and keep that simple. Once that is in place then you move on to the next thing to look at the finer things. But if we don't do the simple basic things first of all. And that's why I say the system is not conducive to doing even the simple basic things. So, other nations in the world actually sometimes laugh at us that on the quality of our coaches, the trainers, and physios, and nutritionists. These are basically basics in sport, but we are starting at this now when our athletes are reaching India level but you know it needs to be done when they are 12-years-old. So, that's what we need to do much better as a nation.

DJ: Given that you work with several athletes now and a lot of coaches are ex-players, what's the delta again from being a good player to a good coach and where do you see people effectively making the transition? That's question one. And the other thing is how do you pick a coach in the context of a player?

VR: So, I will answer the second part first. How do you pick a coach in the context of a player? So, I will answer it with Mary Kom's example. In 2009, women's boxing was introduced in the London 2012 Olympics for the first time ever. Mary was already a five-time world champion winner, but in

the 46 kg weight category and 48 kg for the last one. Now, when women's boxing was announced in 2009, that it would be for the first time in London 2012 Olympics before that boxing was only a men's sport but the least weight category for women was 51 kilos. So, that meant Mary Kom, who was originally a 46 kg boxer, had to move into 51, which is two weight categories higher. It had been unheard of for a boxer to go two weight categories higher and win an Olympic medal. Now, the challenge was, when you're fighting in a weight category not only do you have to put on the right kind of weight but you are fighting against taller opponents, which is a major technical challenge in boxing. If you are fighting against a taller opponent, that's a big challenge. We researched a lot and found a coach by the name of Charles Atkinson who specialized in taking fighters up weight categories and making them into world champions. So, that was the context.

DJ: It's a very specific developmental need and you sort of got a coach for that.

VR: Yes. So, he is specialized in taking fighters up weight categories. He understood the requirements. He understood the specific training needs behind taking fighters up weight categories and the challenges of fighting against taller opponents, etcetera. That was one.

About identifying talented coaches, in general, that would be the basics, about seeing their track record, seeing their temperament, looking at the temperament of the players. Because very often, especially in shooting, one coach might be liked by one shooter but that same coach would not be liked by another shooter, because technical skills within the same event, say 10-meter air rifle shooting, are very different. So, for Gagan Narang, that coach might really work for him, but the coach might not work for another 10-meter air rifle shooter. So, you are going to match all these. Shooting is, uniquely, a very individual sport, because while some say that a coach is good for their technique, the next shooter says that he is tampering with my technique. So, we need to be very careful and constantly monitor very carefully, take feedback from everyone concerned, arrive at a stage where everyone is benefitting from the relationship. But it's a constant process and good monitoring, good relationships, good communication is critical.

DJ: It's easy to measure the performance of a player, but it's much harder to measure the effectiveness of a coach. So, is there a certain way in which you go about doing it at OGQ?

VR: It's difficult to measure the performance of a coach. I would say it's even tougher to measure the performance of a mental training coach, sports psychologist, etcetera, because if the athlete wins, then everyone says, everything is working damn well. If they lose, you are finding people to blame and things that went wrong. So, in general, in the long run, results do count. I wish there was another route, but you tend to know when a boss or a coach is bringing the best out of you, whether he or she is motivating you every single day, whether he or she is teaching you new things, whether you are finding the training session interesting. You are improving, you are learning new skills, and you are improving on your existing skills. So, you need to look at all those factors. But yes, it is hard to measure, hard to really put a very strong matrix in place for every single thing.

DJ: Moving on, I want to pick up on a different theme that I think sports is a great place to learn from, mindfulness, and I bring up mindfulness because we live in a reasonably distracting world, digitally distracting world and when I look at sport, you know, when you are facing let's say if it's tennis you are at championship point either on your side or other side or let's say one or two rallies away from winning the tournament. How do you stay present? How do you stay in the moment or when you are taking a penalty corner as a hockey player? So, any lessons on how this muscle can be built? How do sportsmen build that ability to be present in that moment and keep everything every other noise out of the equation?

VR: Well, that's a good question and I am not exactly sure that I have the right answer for that, but one is obviously you need to know what are the important things for you in life and what really matters to you. And when I was playing, for example, I was extremely focused, I have always done very few things in life but when I did, I make sure I did it 100 percent and playing the match was every single international match meant the world to me. And so, I remember when I was captaining the first time, I was captaining India for the first time, we were playing at Chandigarh, and it was an India-Pakistan series and you walk out of the dugout of the stadium and 50,000 people stand up and cheer for you and the national anthem is sung and you get Goosebumps on your hand. But I used to be so focused so when the match started the crowd is roaring but I never heard anything. So, I was just focused on match match match match. So, it somewhat just knows what is important to you and for me that match was important and everything else did not matter to me.

DJ: You spoke about for example the Australian team training for one-and-a-half hours, but that being a lot more intense and sort of closer to the match experience as compared to eight hours of less intense practice. I am just curious about during moments of practice if there was a way in which mindfulness can be cultivated. So, do sportsmen go through a ritual?

VR: Oh yeah, I would say sportspersons are the most superstitious of the lot. It's not exactly scientific but yeah but again everyone has his or her own space or method of getting into their zone, some are the more outgoing ones and you know they want to listen to music which the rest of the team don't want to hear and some retreat into their space, you have got to respect that space and you want to find what works for you best.

DJ: Got it.

VR: So, that would really vary from individual to individual about what gets you... I am the kind of guy who would always like to retreat quietly into my space before a match or today if I am giving a talk I would just maybe even if it's just five minutes with myself and think about what I am going to say or what I want to get across. Good planning does help or at least having a little bit of an idea of what you want to do, I think that can help a little.

DJ: In summary, any themes that you want to leave the listeners with, for them to play to their potential?

VR: OGQ is exactly in the business of playing to your potential, because Geet Sethi says, if all our Indian athletes play to their potential when it matters at the Olympics, India would win far more many medals. That's what OGQ tries to do, to help our athletes reach their potential. One of my personal mottos in life is to have the courage to succeed. It's far easier to give up, to say, you know, oh, I have lost and everyone is against me and everything is against me and there are too many challenges. It's far easier to grumble and criticize. It takes much more courage to actually do and inch forward and then eventually succeed. I just want people to have the courage to succeed in whatever they are doing in life and maybe then, our country would become a far better nation as we concentrate all our focus and energy on playing to our potential.

I want to take this opportunity to maybe tell people to, in their own little way, to make a difference to sport and support an organization like OGQ. There are a lot of young athletes out there, coming from maybe not-so-well-to-do backgrounds, but they are super-talented. They have the potential to win medals for India at the highest stage and really make the entire nation proud. Sport has the power to cut across barriers, religion, caste, and creed, to get everyone together. Sport has the power to teach so many life lessons that probably the classroom cannot teach. We must make sport a more integral part of our education. I want people to support Olympic Gold Quest. It's an

organization that has, I can assure you, if I can say for myself, that has credibility, transparency, and is showing impact. So, we need to give the opportunity to those kids. Do support OGQ.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I hope you found this conversation purposeful. I look forward to having you at one of the subsequent conversation at the Play to potential podcast series. If you want to listen offline either during a car ride or a plane ride, you could find the podcast on iTunes, Stitcher or one of the other Podcast apps.

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Viren Rasquinha - Nuggets

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- 08.02 Viren Rasquinha - Committing to sports as a career
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- 08.06 Viren Rasquinha - Joining OGQ — Role of serendipity

- 08.07 Viren Rasquinha - Building the grit muscle
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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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