



The Every Day Olympian

It was an early morning in a modest town just 2 hours outside of Moscow. I stood in front of our small hotel watching wrestlers of all sizes and nationalities trickle out of the doorway with that unmistakable stone-like stare...The one that is reserved for only those who have walked the difficult road and come out the other side hardened and focused. The sun had just come up but was struggling to poke through a web of thick clouds. It created a surreal setting as the individual light rays shown down and glistened off of the crystal white frost that covered the grass and trees. I thought to myself “What a great day to go to battle against some of the best in the world”.

We all piled into a number of buses and were transported to the local arena. The town itself was as average as I could have imagined. Nothing along our route gave any inclination that today would be anything but the usual competition.

As we walked into the stadium, it was apparent the heat wasn't working. We could see our breath and the mats were frozen to the point where they barely compressed under our feet. I cringed at the thought of how painful it was going to be to warm up and compete on such unforgiving mats. I then walked into the bathroom and found no toilet in sight, just a hole in the floor. Then there was something shiny that caught my eye. To my right, in a small garbage can were two syringes that were clearly just used. What were they used for? Is this common here? Should I be worried about contracting something? As I





reached into my bag, I realized my water bottle had spilled all over my gear. The day was no longer surreal.

I returned back to the warm up area where I witnessed everyone going about their business. Some were jogging around, others were jumping rope and many were sparring with a partner. I remember thinking to myself how this must be what a parallel universe feels like. On the surface things are the same, but the subtle differences add up to create personal chaos. It was distinctly certain that the day's usual preparation and rituals were going to be different. At first I was a bit frustrated and voiced my concerns to my coach...which fell on deaf ears. I then tried to just ignore parts of the situation...which helped a little, but the pain of the hard mat, and wet clothes were constant reminders.

I describe this event because it supports a trigger phrase I use when factors outside of my control seem to work against me. **“Remove the barriers”**. I know...It's a bit cliché, but it still triggers a specific state of mind. What separates “Every Day Olympians” is how they approach those unexpected events. They don't complain or ignore, they strategize. What's the situation? What concrete effect will it have on performance? What do I observe others doing? What can I do that's within the realm of control to minimize the effect? *(Or in the words of Clint Eastwood in Heartbreak Ridge...Improvise, Adapt and Overcome)*

You see, success is never a straight line. It is an interconnected web of paths. When a barrier is in your current path, you have two options that can lead to success: Either come up with an alternative route that may involve backtracking, or spend the time and effort tearing down the barrier. But dwelling on and complaining about it only leads to excuses and disappointment. Hoping it goes away by ignoring it doesn't work either. *“Hope is not a strategy”*. Remember...It's what we do in scarcity, not prosperity that defines who we are and what we are capable of.