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Struggling to achieve

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Keywords: Celebrity, competition, goals, attitudes, achievement, success, failure, training, life

TV series title: The Games
Tagline: 10 celebs in ruthless competition. One goal. To be the winner of The Games
Production company: Endemol UK
Broadcaster: Channel 4
First broadcast: March-April 2005

Channel Four's reality TV series *The Games* has recently completed its third series, fading out to the strains of (*Something Inside*) *So Strong* (Michael Ball, 1996) on Friday 1 April 2005. The programme, riding on the success of other commercially viable programmes such as *Celebrity Big Brother* and *I'm a Celebrity, Get me Out of Here*, challenged ten minor celebrities to compete in a series of athletic events over eight days. Kirsty Gallagher (currently on *Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway*) was this year's female winner, followed by Lisa Maffia (formerly of *So Solid Crew*), HRH Princess Tamara (television presenter, from the Spanish Royal family), Anna Walker (former presenter of *Walker's World*) and Mel Giedroyc (comediienne). The men's competition was won by Philip Olivier (formerly in *Brookside*), followed by Kevin Simm (singer in *Liberty X*), Chesney Hawkes (best known for his 1990s single *The One and Only*), Craig Charles (*Red Dwarf* and *Robot Wars*) and Danny Foster (formerly of *Hear 'Say*). Danny Foster joined mid-series after Jonathan Morris (formerly in *Bread*) left, claiming that he had underestimated the physical and mental energy required for the series.

Starting from different levels of fitness, the celebrities were given twelve weeks of training by experts in each of the disciplines they were to compete in: javelin, vault, diving, weightlifting, sumo wrestling and speed skating for the men; 50m freestyle swimming, hurdles, hammer throwing, cycling, trampolining and floor gymnastics for the women, with both competing in a 100m sprint as a finale. The week before the first event was to be filmed live, Channel 4 presented footage of the celebrities in training, including the real highs and lows of each discipline. The live nights, hosted by Jamie Theakston and Jayne Middlemass, saw the celebrities put their training into practice with one shot to get it right, live in front of the television cameras and a cheering crowd. Did the contestants come through under pressure, and what was their reaction to winning or losing?

Coverage on E4 'live from the athletes' village' showed the preparation and heats for each event, and the post-event elation or depression. Emotions ran high with tears and tantrums, frustration and laughter, childish behaviour and copious amounts of alcohol (what that does for fitness levels is questionable). This heightened sense of emotions was evident in the bitter disappointment etched on the faces of contestants who failed to achieve what they felt to be their best, and voiced by Anna Walker after the trampolining. The series, however, appears healthier and more positive than, for example, *Celebrity Big Brother* as the contestants are all striving to achieve, and get a chance to shake off their excess energy each evening, rather than sitting around and waiting for the next order from 'Big Brother'.

The celebrities were also looking to a higher goal with each supporting a particular charity, raising awareness through television interviews as part of the programme, and information on the accompanying website (www.channel4.com/thegames), whilst money was raised through a competition hotline to win a car each night. The charitable revenues raised from the show are distributed according to the individual athlete's score (with the sum in the charity pot divided by the total number of points scored during *The Games*).

The series, appearing at a time when London is competing to host the 2012 Olympic Games, appears to encapsulate the true spirit of the Olympics as originally envisaged, with amateurs competing to the best of their ability in a spirit of healthy competition. Contestants constantly congratulated and supported each other's efforts. The emphasis was not just on winning (although this, and record breaking, are significant). Instead it was on achieving personal goals and aims (contestants' eyes switching from acknowledging the crowd to focusing on the end goal) and on achieving a Personal Best (PB) for which an extra point was added to the scoreboards. This is very much in tune with British culture which approves of those who try, and supports the underdog, as evidenced by the continual references to Craig Charles and Mel Giedroyc and the extra cheers they got on completion of each event. Mel described herself as 'a slightly overweight 36 year old woman' who had just climbed her 'Everest' on near-successful completion of her trampolining routine. A combination of pride, and a determination to do his best (for himself and his chosen charity) ensured that Craig Charles re-entered for the water-ski jump despite having suffered whiplash in the Sumo Wrestling two days before.

Contestants had to overcome adversity, combat fears, get up and brush themselves off after any falls, and had to work hard to get it right on the night. We can see the necessity for training and practice in life, with the need to focus on the goal rather than necessarily on 'winning' - although the apostle Paul notes that 'many runners enter a race, and only one of them wins the prize. So run to win!' (1 Corinthians 9:24, CEV). A little healthy competition never hurt anyone and we must strive to be the best we can be, although we also need to be aware of those around us and support their goals in life. We cannot underestimate the energy required, and can expect our first efforts (in each discipline/new area) to be fumbling. But we need to be unafraid to fall, brush ourselves off, and continue in the 'race for life'. For followers of Jesus Christ, as 1 Corinthians 9:25 declares: 'Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last, but we do it for a crown that will last forever' (CEV).

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