

Team Toyota's Daryl Homer on Being Excited About What's Next

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When Team Toyota fencer Daryl Homer won silver at the Olympic Games Rio 2016, the accomplishment was the culmination of years of hard work. But the 32-year-old, now in the midst of training for the Olympic Games Paris 2024, is learning that the trajectory of his athletic career doesn't have to be so linear.

"I'm focused on retraining my mind and not looking at success as something finite," Homer says. "It starts with being excited about what's next. You have to be excited about what's impossible, and excited about trying to change that."

Homer is a three-time U.S. Olympian who competed in London, Rio and Tokyo for Team USA in men's sabre. When the fencer won a silver medal at Rio, he became the first U.S. medalist in men's sabre since Peter Westbrook took a bronze medal in 1984. In the years since 2016, Homer says he's begun to better appreciate his accomplishments and how rare it is to compete in something like the Olympics — let alone take the podium. That's why the champion fencer is working on celebrating that moment and appreciating the win while still training for a shot at the next.

"Medaling in the Olympic Games was an amazing moment," he says. "More recently, I've been more able to come to understand that fighting for that was a really big deal. But I think one thing we don't talk about enough is, What do you do after that? How do you repeat that experience?"

To regain focus and motivation, Homer will remind himself of the careers of his own favorite athletes and how they reinvent themselves and find continued success. Focusing on his mindset is familiar to Homer since fencing can be such a mentally demanding sport.

"Fencing is very dynamic," Homer says. "It's like physical chess. To be successful at it, you really have to know yourself. You have to be able to control your emotions while being creative and courageous to take risks at the right times."

Transformative "Firsts"

Homer was born in the U.S. Virgin Islands and moved to the Bronx with his mother and younger sister when he was 5 years old. When Homer expressed interest in fencing, his mother signed him up to take lessons at the Peter Westbrook Foundation in the Chelsea neighborhood in Manhattan. The Peter Westbrook Foundation has an all-volunteer staff comprised primarily of Olympians and former Olympians, including Peter Westbrook himself — Homer's former coach and mentor — and legendary fencer Keeth Smart.

"I grew up in the Bronx, New York, so of course I wanted to play basketball," he says. "But when I picked up the sword and someone said, 'Ready, fence,' it just felt really natural for me, and I enjoyed it a lot."

Homer began fencing around 11 years old and started taking the sport seriously a year later. Despite his interest, the young athlete still wanted to be a kid. After school, he would often stick around to play basketball with his friends, and then show up late to fencing practice.

"As a teenager, I flipped that dynamic," he says. "I started coming in to practice early, doing more work alone, then going to practice with everyone else. That's when my results started to shift. I would say I learned the work ethic by being around great role models."

Homer remembers the moment when he saw his hard work was paying off. He was 15 years old and starting to put in work, but he felt like many of his peers had better results on the strip than he did. Then, in a competition, he beat a fencer who was five or six years older, and something clicked.

“I definitely lost to someone right after that, but it didn’t matter,” he says. “Those ‘firsts’ — the first time you win the NCAA championship, the first time you win a national championship, the first time you win an Olympic medal – are things that are transformative experiences.”

Building a Support System

Heading into what will be his fourth Olympic cycle, Homer has developed a comprehensive support system including his family, his fencing club and his local community. The U.S. Olympian says he’s lucky to have so many different kinds of people looking out for him.

“After I got back from Tokyo, I was bummed I didn’t come home with a medal,” Homer says. “I didn’t perform the way I wanted to. When I went to my barbershop, those guys picked me up. My neighborhood was so supportive of me.”

Of course, so is Team Toyota. Homer says he’s grown close with a big group of fellow Team Toyota athletes who joined the roster around the same time as he did, more than four years ago.

“When we all get together here, it’s just like family,” he says. “There are my teammates and the marketing department, but also the wider organization. Everyone has been incredible. It empowers you on your journey to have so many people rooting for you every day.”