



As Good As Gold: 1 Woman, 9 Sports, 10 Countries and a a 2-Year Quest to Make the Summer Olympics

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Imagine George Plimpton. Except with real athletic ability. And he's a woman. And she's taken on a challenge that makes *Paper Lion* look like a brisk game of Go Fish.

Meet Kathryn Bertine, elite triathlete, former professional figure skater, and starving artist. Just as her personal and professional dreams begin to crumble in the summer of 2006, ESPN stakes her to a dream: Take two years to make the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing. **As Good As Gold** is the heroic, hilarious account of Bertine's serial exertions in the realms of triathlon, modern pentathlon, team handball, track cycling, road cycling, rowing, open water swimming, racewalking, and—fasten your seatbelts—luge.

On her journey, the obstacles range from jet lag to jellyfish, flat tires to floundering relationships, repeated rejection to road rash. But, as time is running out, Bertine doesn't sweat the small stuff, only the large—like scouring the globe for a tiny nation to adopt her, and pushing her body and mind as far as it will go. Maybe all the way to China.

Between harrowing, often laugh-out-loud episodes of triumph and humiliation, Bertine takes short “Water Breaks” to contemplate the ins-and-outs of fan mail, failure, rehydration, nasal reconstruction, and how best to punish steroid users.

Kathryn Bertine swims, runs, and rides—and *writes*—like a champion. In **As Good as Gold**, Bertine proves she has something more valuable than an Olympic medal. She's got Olympic mettle. When it comes to the human heart, she takes the gold.

As Good As Gold: 1 Woman, 9 Sports, 10 Countries and a a 2-Year Quest to Make the Summer Olympics Details

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Ericka says

This is a great book about life transitions, in particular about the practice of asking. Bertine doesn't talk about the intricacies of sport, at least not to the point of alienating average readers, or even much about the work she does. What the reader sees a lot of is her willingness to attempt things and make inquiries. Or maybe that's what I'm seeing in these tea leaves because it's such a tough ask for me. Very readable.

Tara says

Although the title refers to Kathryn Bertine's journey to make it to the Olympics, the title is quite fitting, for the book itself is a gem. As Good as Gold brings the reader on a journey from average (or very good) athlete to Olympic Hopeful. It reminded me that most dreams are worth the time, effort and dedication it might take to get to their destination. As a woman in my thirties, it was wonderful to read about the athletic pursuits of a member of my own generation. Bertine's writing style is never sappy or sloppy, often funny and a joy to read. Highly recommended for anyone who has ever had a dream (athletic or not).

Polly says

Very funny.

Chrissie says

A professional triathlete, Bertine sets out to qualify for the 2008 Summer Olympics in any sport. A very fun and educational read - you get to learn all about the intricacies of team handball and modern pentathlon! Bertine strikes a great balance between having a sense of humor about her undertakings and exploring the emotional side of being an athlete. During her quest, she was chronicling her adventures as a column for ESPN.com, and it reads a bit like that. Overall, loved it and have already recommended it to multiple people.

Isha says

I don't understand why this book is so unknown. I LOVED it. Yes, from a certain perspective the story falls into the same category as The Happiness Project or Not Eating Out in New York: a woman chooses a particular challenge to "better herself" and sets out for a year to do so. The comparison ends there. Part

madcap antics through a variety of Olympic sports, part following her dreams in spite of nearly impossible odds to become an elite cyclist, Kathryn Bertine alternates between wit, personal insight, and inspirational and motivational moments so profound (to me, anyway, and since I'm currently suffering from my quarter-life crisis you can take that with a grain of salt) that I actually turned down a few corners to mark passages, which I NEVER do.

In short: read this book. If nothing else, you'll get a few laughs, but in all likelihood, whether or not you're an athlete you'll find something in here that speaks to you.

Sarah says

A hilarious book. Bertrine, a former figure skater and professional triathlete, as well as a columnist for ESPN, is given a two-year challenge by the network to qualify for the olympics in any sport. She leaves no stone unturned, or sport untested, in her attempt to qualify. Critics fault Bertrine for the wide net she casts, trying sports like handball and luge which she has no experience in or hopes to master. I won't go any further into the plot of her story, but feel that Bertrine's critics are missing the point. This woman is a kickass endurance athlete, she competed professionally on the Ironman circuit and has a real olympic dream. She also happens to be an MFA graduate and, fortunately, gets this dream quest sponsored by ESPN. I don't know how Bertrine physically endured the nearly two-year training in her final sport of choice. She has an amazing attitude and is absolutely hilarious.

My one criticism is that the book is full of typos, like a chapter's worth- mostly missing articles that the brain quickly adds, but it's a shame ESPN didn't take more care.

Patrick says

One of the most inspirational books I have ever read. Captures the mindset and struggles of athletes that anyone can relate to, Olympian and above-average. Easy reading, great prose, and I feel like she was writing about me. I cannot recommend it enough.

Jenny says

I really enjoyed Kathryn's story and learning about some more obscure Olympic sports along the way. The second half of the book I read quite quickly as I was rooting for her and wanting to see what would happen (I suppose I could've just read her Wiki and spoiled it, but I enjoyed the way the book unfolded with her optimism and drive)

Mike says

I don't normally read much in the realm of either sports or autobiography, but after stumbling across some of this author's columns on ESPN, I decided to read this book. I'm glad I did. The author predominantly

maintains a humorous voice while detailing a very unusual experience: being contracted by ESPN as a good athlete and writer to attempt to qualify for an Olympic sport in two years. Katherine attends training camps and evaluation procedures in a variety of sports, before settling on her best chance, which she then progresses in from rank amateur to eligible for the US Olympic Trials in the course of 6 months (albeit aided by it being tightly related to a sport in which she was a low level professional athlete.) With a nearly insane level of dedication, she manages to make failing to secure a spot on the US national team not be an end to her attempt, eventually pitching her case for dual citizenship to a nation she had never previously visited, and then flying around the world to attempt to earn enough points in the international cycling federation's qualification procedure to get to Beijing.

Melissa says

While most of the population has Walter Mitty daydreams of Olympic glory, Kathryn Bertine has the talent and determination to make her dream a reality. She also has the inner drive to pursue it with every ounce of her being, and the luck to have ESPN bankroll her documentation of it all. The reality is, lucky us, for she took us along with her.

I appreciate her narrative style, and the introduction of other Olympic-caliber athletes that gut it out in crap conditions merely because they love it. I also enjoyed learning about the fringe sports and glad she had the opportunity to try luge -- don't forget about us winter athletes, Skatie Katie!

I've read some of the criticism of her representing another country, but I appreciate her rationale, and how she gave back to that country. It's hard to be caring and giving when athletic pursuits are so singular.

Kathryn is a real inspiration to adult athletes, from pros to us "weekend warriors," who are no less competitive as we juggle our ambitions with jobs, children, spouses, electric bills, and groceries.

If I had to offer any criticism, it would be that for a book published in 2010, why black and white photographs when I know production of color plates is comparable to b/w. I guess I would have liked more photos, diagrams, etc. to help visualize Kathryn's narrative.

BTW, we'd love to have you join the competitive adult skating community.

Liralen says

Bertine was older than your average Olympic hopeful trying out a new sport when she set out to qualify for the 2008 summer Olympics, but she had an advantage. A couple of them, actually. One, her two-year attempt was funded by ESPN; she wrote articles throughout the process but didn't have to, say, wait tables.

The idea that I could be an athlete and a journalist seems to confuse people. An athlete who works in a coffee shop while trying to get to the Olympics is rarely considered to be a barista first, an athlete second. She's merely doing what it takes to support her dream. A writer, on the other hand, still evokes the stereotype in which writers write and do nothing else. (12)

Two, and perhaps more critically, Bertine was already an elite athlete: in a previous life she'd been a

professional figure skater, and she'd recently qualified as an elite triathlete. Still, with her focus on endurance rather than speed, the Olympic-length triathlon wasn't a good fit...and in any case, ESPN wanted her to try new things.

Enter team handball: *I consult my memory of high school physics to recall if it is even possible to make a goal from this angle. No, it's not. It is, in fact, impossible. Then I recall that I didn't take high school physics.* (47)

Some of the attempts go better than others, though it doesn't take too long for Bertine to understand that it will be nigh on impossible to succeed at such a high level of a sport she's never played before. *I can only be so disappointed about not making a national team in a sport I've been playing for ninety-six hours* (53).

It is also clear, early on, that whether or not she achieves her goal of making the Olympics, she is in for an experience of a lifetime. Although the goal is the summer Olympics, she is invited to try her hand at the luge so that she can learn (again) that a sport she thought would be child's play is, well...not. *Let me make this painfully brief: Out of a possible 128 points comprising the luge physical testing program, I get a zero* (113). She ends up in Australia and China while in pursuit of her dream.

Things go better when Bertine turns back to sports she has experience with—those involving swimming and biking, for example. Eventually she figures out where she has the best chance of succeeding. She settles on a sport and, gradually, sees herself improve.

It's more complicated than that, of course, but I don't want to give away too much—although some of it is guessable. In any case, it's a lot of fun as a book. Bertine has a ton of energy as a writer, so I can only imagine how much energy she brings to athletics. Moreover, it just...sounds like a terrific experience. Exhausting, and stressful, and difficult...and still terrific.

And I'll leave you with this: *My swimming career started and ended the same day, back in 1986, at a local Westchester, New York, summer swim league meet. A teenage coach entered my eleven-year-old self in the 50-yard backstroke event. I won, and then was promptly disqualified. The coach explained that stopping at the shallow end to stand up and wave at parents was not permitted. I decided I liked figure skating better, where standing was encouraged, waving optional.* (122)

Benjaminxjackson says

I first saw Kathryn Bertine's writing when she was doing a series of columns on ESPN.com about trying to become an Olympian. This book is the results of her attempt, beginning in 2006, to qualify for the Beijing Summer Olympics.

Like probably 90% of everyone who knows about them, Bertine's goal was to find a sport where she could compete in the summer Olympics. Unlike the rest of us dreamers, though, she was an elite triathlete when she started. So, she had a leg up in trying to learn a sport and become an Olympian.

Her triathlon distance was longer than the Olympic distance, so she was not an automatic shoe-in for that team. The book chronicles her experiences in trying new sports, trying to find one where her natural and trained athletic abilities would be enough to get her in the door.

Her struggles with all the sports she tries as she pursues her goals will ring true to anyone who has played a sport that is a bit outside the mainstream. Still her writing makes all the hard work sound like fun and as a bit of humor and perspective to sore muscles, disappointing results, and the struggles of the beginner. The work she does in her training and the results she achieves lend credence to every amateur dreamer out there who sweats and bleeds while friends say "why do you bother." I particularly liked her "Mental Earplugs" section where she describes what an athlete hears.

She also has strong encouragement for women's athletics and how they should be treated on par with men's sports. And, she's right. Sports can go a long way to helping all of us develop ourselves, and her book should be of interest to anyone who is an amateur athlete or who supports the athletes in their lives.

Josh says

i loved this book. everything about it. kathryn is an amazing woman, chasing her dreams through an array of sports around the world while endeavoring on this quest sponsored by ESPN - which gave her what was most likely her best chance to be an olympian.

her writing style is interesting and engaging. the talent she has as a writer are nearly equal to her skills as a professional athlete.

as i progressed through this book i swear i could feel her pain, the disappointment she felt at not making the cuts in the sports she pursued, the intense happiness in her victories, and her solemn reflection at the end on her spectacular 2 year journey.

as a trained creative writer (she has an MFA) her use of imagery, descriptives and creative writing techniques made this one of the most enjoyable reads i've attempted in a very long time.

Brian Carrigan says

very good, funny and Kathryn is a power house

David Peters says

Have you ever watched the Olympics, or any top level sporting event for that matter, and thought to yourself "I could totally do that." The Editors at ESPN wondered the same thing and went to find a test subject. What makes this whole experience more humbling is Kathryn Bertine was no couch potato, she was a formidable athlete in her own right. National class ice skater in her youth, college rower in her early twenties, and an elite triathlete as an adult. Could she do it in 2 years?

What follows is her journey's through a variety of Olympic Sports, both known and obscure, in an effort to make the team. She even gives a try at the luge, and while loving it manages to score a zero on the physical assessment test. This is a great look at what it takes to make the Olympic team, and in a sense any dream we might hold in our heart. Commitment, sacrifice, and handwork; they are all required. How many of us are giving the bare minimum to get by in our passions, our families, and our jobs?

A must read for anyone reaching for the stars and wanting some motivation in their life.
