

Everyday athletes may be able to train brains to perform like a pro

By Alex Hutchinson, *Outside*

It goes without saying that Olympic athletes need to be strong, fit, and tough. But none of that matters if they aren't capable of adapting quickly to unexpected circumstances. Take former Slovenian swimmer Sara Isakovic. During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, with one length remaining in the 200-meter freestyle final, disaster struck. Isakovic misjudged her final flip turn, and as she uncoiled her legs to explode off the wall, she could feel her toes just barely graze it.

"I remember thinking, This is not happening! Why now?" Isakovic, 25, recalls. "Then, in a split second, I was able to refocus." Riding on a surge of adrenaline, she tore down the last length to nab a silver medal, breaking the previous world record and missing gold by just 0.15 seconds.

Isakovic is now a research assistant in psychiatry at UC San Diego, where she works with Martin Paulus, a leading player in the search for brain – training techniques that will enable the rest of us to develop elite-level mental agility. Says Isakovic, "What we're interested in is how you build resilience, how you train your brain to be as tough as your body."

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