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Balance between preparation and performance on final day the crux

I have been running ever since I can remember, and I have loved running ever since I can remember. However, at some point rather early in life, the run gradually transformed into a chase. A chase for greater speed, better fitness, bigger accolades – simply put, a chase and quest for excellence.

Very often, elite athletes are asked whether the rigours of professional training and the pressure of expectation detract from his or her love for sport. I cannot speak for everybody but these factors enhanced my love for running. It spurred me on and made me aspire for more and, as I succeeded at every level, it became clear to me that if I stayed the course, I could win on the international stage as well.

But it was not always easy going and there were disappointments and setbacks along the way. In 1988, the injury during the Olympics trials kept me from qualifying for the Seoul Games. I decided to learn from this disappointment and from there on, I began to work on my fitness, my health and other aspects of keeping myself injury free.

It became clear that this regime working as I did well in Barcelona but if I had to choose the happiest and the toughest moment, it had to be Atlanta 1996. It was the perfect setting and opportunity to win in front of my home crowd and yes, there was the pressure of expectation. A lot of the focus was on the golden shoes I was wearing but I was fully focussed on winning the two races – the 200 and 400m. I finally did achieve it and it was the perfect moment when one's dreams become reality.

I still enjoy watching athletics and the debate on how one generation would shape up against the other. I have been asked whether Usain Bolt would be the perfect opponent. I feel he is an incredible runner but these questions are irrelevant. When you are on the field, all opponents are faceless and nameless and just opponents. A perfect athlete is just focussed on his goal of reaching the finish line first.

That balance between preparation and performance on the final day is what every athlete aspires for. And when it all comes together like it did for me at Atlanta in 1996, it is a moment of perfect satisfaction and pride.