

Beating the Impossible: A Life of Comebacks, Extreme Sports and PTSD

Don Schwartz

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An intimate look inside the mind of an athlete, Beating the Impossible is an extraordinary memoir about survival.

Canadian snowboarding pioneer Don Schwartz's inspirational memoir *Beating the Impossible* is about overcoming severe injuries to be crowned a champion in multiple arenas.

When he was twenty years old, Schwartz endured severe burns in a helicopter crash that killed three of his friends. He was intubated, told that his ear and nose would fall off, and had to regrow skin. While in recovery, he lost forty pounds.

But these events are not Schwartz's whole story. After recounting the crash and its aftermath, the book covers Schwartz's life story in order. It encompasses highs as well as lows: Schwartz won the Death Race and the Barefoot Waterskiing World Championship; he came close to winning the title of World's Toughest Mudder. A lifelong competitor, he also became a regular motivational speaker for the Burn Fund in Vancouver.

The text recounts Schwartz's struggles with PTSD, even as he remained driven to seek extreme sports glory. Indeed, he recalls handling the trauma itself in an unusual way—by taking a helicopter pilot course that forced him to confront his fears head-on. And whether it is recalling the horrific disfigurement Schwartz suffered, reckoning with his fear of heights, or confessing to his coping mechanisms, the book blends psychological research into its story to proffer relatable insights for others.

Shrewd discussions of motivation as a virtue repeat throughout the book. Schwartz parses the quality from a number of angles, seeking a comprehensive understanding of what it entails. He notes that being told that he couldn't do a particular activity in fact motivated him to try harder. The book crystallizes his story as one about how failures kept him going. Schwartz recalls studying motivational materials as part of his training process, taking heart in signs that assured him, "Pain is temporary, but internet race results are forever."

Direct but still dramatic, the text takes pleasure in itemizing challenges like injuries: a broken leg, two broken wrists, two broken elbows, the replacement of tendons and ligaments, and other surgeries. Its accounts of pain are palpable, further exemplifying Schwartz's dogged determination to persist through endurance races and other sporting events. And it ends with praise for alternative healing and a deft summary of the lessons that Schwartz learned because he chose to challenge himself so much.

Beating the Impossible is the extraordinary memoir of an extreme athlete who came back from unimaginable hardships to ascend to great heights.

JOSEPH S. PETE (September 13, 2022)

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