

# The myth of natural talent

August 15 2012, by Karen Farquharson

---



Photo: London Annie

Once again, the myth of natural talent rears its ugly head. This pernicious myth suggests that Black athletes are better at sport than White athletes, and also that White athletes have to be cleverer and more hard-working than Black athletes to succeed in sport.

The myth situates the successes of [Black athletes](#) as due to innate ability, downplaying the focus and hard work they have done, while simultaneously situating the successes of White athletes in the opposite

way, celebrating their ‘unlikely’ achievements.

This myth, though always present, frequently emerges at great sporting competitions. Here it has been bandied about in the context of the great success of the Jamaicans and African Americans in the athletics competition. The myth says of course they won, they are Black; Blacks always win. It conveniently ignores White success, or situates it as an aberration.

It is a myth. There is no evidence that Black athletes are better at sport than White athletes. Geneticists have long known that there is greater genetic variation within so-called racial groups than between them. Indeed, race itself is a social construction: there is no genetic basis for race.

Think about the category “Black”. It includes people of African, South Asian, Pacific Islander, Aboriginal and mixed backgrounds, and who is included varies depending on where it is being discussed.

Likewise, the category “White” may include people from the Middle East and Southern Europe, or it may not, depending on where you are. There are light-skinned people who are considered Black, and there are dark-skinned people who are considered White.

There may be genetic differences that are associated with better sports performances, but these do not fall along racial lines.

The athletes themselves buy into the myth, and it arguably affects their performance. If a White athlete thinks they can’t beat the Black athletes, then they have lost before they even compete.

On the other side, Black athletes don’t want to lose to White athletes because they aren’t supposed to be as good, so the Black athletes race

extra hard. There is nothing genetic here, but the mind games can have an impact.

The [myth](#) is pernicious because it gives the impression that Black athletes are not students of their game, and are not suited to thinking strategically, to providing leadership on the field, or in coaching positions after they finish playing.

It should be challenged whenever it is raised.

*This story is published courtesy of the [The Conversation](#) (under Creative Commons-Attribution/No derivatives).*

Source: The Conversation

Citation: The myth of natural talent (2012, August 15) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-myth-natural-talent.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--