

RESILIENCE & GRIT:

Amanda Sobhy

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What does it really mean to have grit? And where do we, as competitive athletes, improve our grit and resilience? Dr. Angela Duckworth, a pioneer and best-selling author, defines grit as “passion and sustained persistence applied toward long-term achievement, with no particular concern for rewards or recognition along the way. It combines resilience, ambition and self-control in the pursuit of goals that take months, years or even decades.”

One of my former Stanford professors, Dr. Carol Dweck, has done extensive research on growth mindset and how grit and resilience are created from this type of specific motivation. This groundbreaking concept, Dweck writes, is that “people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.” Dweck’s research has shown that there are four main factors that affect our own grit: our beliefs about ourselves, our goals, our feelings about our social connectedness and our self-regulatory skills.

About five years ago, I suffered a season-ending injury. I was diagnosed with compartment syndrome in my shin, which resulted in surgery right at the beginning of collegiate season. It took many visits to a Stanford sports psychologist and devoted hours practicing what I was told to do to get through this dark time. The combined efforts of my therapist and my extreme determination to make a comeback is what made me come out the other side. I have the rediscovery of my grit to thank for that.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Team USA’s Amanda Sobhy about her experience during her own personal hurdle: rupturing her Achilles in March 2017.

THIS WAS ONE OF THE BIGGEST SETBACKS IN YOUR SQUASH CAREER.

WHAT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST THOUGHTS THAT WENT THROUGH YOUR HEAD? DID YOU FEEL LIKE IT WAS ALL OVER?

AMANDA SOBHY: The first thoughts that were going through my

head were “How did I rupture my Achilles? How could I, a healthy, fit twenty-three-year-old rupture an Achilles?” It was the shock more than anything of the injury that was just going through my mind. I knew it would be a setback since I was at my career high ranking at the time and gaining momentum on the pro tour, but there was never a doubt that I would come back.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST THING YOU FOCUSED ON DURING YOUR RECOVERY?

AS: For me, the most important thing throughout the recovery was looking at the positives in the injury. Yes, I was going to be out of commission for nine months, but I saw that as an opportunity to be a normal, non-squash playing, human for the first time in my life. I’ve never had so much time off from squash. I decided to use this time to enjoy life. I hung out with friends, went to concerts and music festivals, ate and drank what I wanted. I had the best time ever. It was not a sustainable lifestyle, but by the time I hit a squash ball, five months post-surgery, I was refreshed and excited to start up again.

AFTER MAKING IT THROUGH YOUR RECOVERY PROCESS, DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR MINDSET AND YOUR GRIT HAS CHANGED OR INCREASED?

AS: This injury has made me a lot tougher as a person both mentally and physically. When you go through a traumatic, career-threatening injury as a professional athlete, you learn a lot about yourself. To overcome this injury and get back to the level I’m at today took so much strength and resilience. There were many ups and downs. It was by far the hardest thing I’ve ever had to go through, but I came out on the other side as a stronger person. I now use this as fuel when I’m in brutal training sessions or battling it out on court in a match. If I can survive an Achilles rupture and come back from it, then I can push through a match when I’m down or tired.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO OTHERS STRUGGLING TO FIND THEIR GRIT?

AS: Get out of your comfort zone. When you have no control and you’re being tested in life, then you’ll truly find out just how strong you can be. **SM**

