

THE MIDAS TOUCH

APOLO OHNO IS ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST DECORATED SPEED SKATERS. BUT HIS BUSINESS ACUMEN IS HELPING HIM STRIKE GOLD OFF THE ICE. BY JOHN MIHALY

WHEN YOU HEAR the name Apolo Anton Ohno, you may think of three consecutive Winter Olympic appearances and more medals in speed skating than any human neck could wear at one time. You might even think of the Season 4 winner of *Dancing With the Stars*. But what about the Apolo involved in the nutraceutical industry as the co-founder of 8zone? Or the Apolo working in the mining industry scouring the planet for rare minerals and metals? Then there's the Apolo working with the global marketing company, the technology companies, and the global development companies. And let's not forget Apolo's own brand that includes countless speaking engagements and an ambassadorship for the Special Olympics. And in his spare time he's competing in an Ironman triathlon. So how does an athlete take a life centered around the ice rink and cutthroat competition and turn that into a diversified global business brand? Well, we'll let Apolo explain...

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSH MADSON



JACKET, SAND;
SHIRT, RAG & BONE –
AVAILABLE AT NEIMAN
MARCUS; SWEATER
AND JEANS, G-STAR

Look beyond the game as early as possible

If you had asked me when I was 16 or 17 years old what I wanted to do, I would have said that I wanted to live and die in the ice rink. Speed skating was all I cared about. Nothing else was interesting to me. Then I realized that as I was traveling the world at such a young age, I was meeting so many influential individuals, political figures, and very powerful business families around the world. I started to develop these relationships early. I didn't know it at the time, but these relationships would further my opportunities on a global scale later on in life.

Be curious about everything

I wanted to know why people I met were successful in their respective fields. I knew why I was successful—the attributes and things that made me strong as an athlete. But I was more interested in the tech industry, people who were involved in real estate, people who were involved in natural resources. How did they get into those positions? Was it by dumb luck? Was it by family? I started to slowly educate myself by reading and asking these successful individuals questions.

Failure is an option, and it's worth the risk

I don't like to fail. I hate losing obviously, but I'm not afraid to take risks when I see the opportunity. In speed skating, if you're going to attempt a pass, but you hold back a little bit because you have reservations, it's not going to be the same as making an assertive decision on the ice. You can't be afraid to fail. You have to go in wholeheartedly knowing that if you do fail that it's OK. I understand my own intellect. I can surround myself with great people. It's not the end of the world. When you have that in your head, it forces you to prepare the best that you can. By leaving no stone unturned in your preparation, when you go into that boardroom for negotiation time or when you're trying to sign that deal you feel like you can't lose.

Always reexamine the plan

I have short-term goals and long-term goals. I usually look at quarterlies as my game plan. I even plot as far out as 10-year plans, even though they end up changing every few months.

Know your limitations

I feel like I'm spread too thin all the time...and I love it. It feels like Saran wrap holding up a bowling ball. That's part of my personality but I enjoy it. I would never take a role in a company—with the exception of one—where I work day to day as the CEO. I would rather hire somebody with the credentials and who has had experience at running day-to-day operations of the company. I'm the visionary, I'm the

guy who architects and puts together the deal. That to me is more exciting.

Don't discount your athletic accomplishments

When I retired, the first goal I had was to become well known as a business man and almost have people forget what I've done as an Olympic athlete. I've reversed my role on that. I went to three Olympic Games. I have learned so much from sport in terms of life lessons, camaraderie, teamwork, individuality, and character-building qualities. These things helped accelerate my learning process in a way that nothing else could. On one hand, I want to be successful as much as possible in business, but that being said, sports made me who I am today. That is who I always will be. I will always revert back to being an athlete. That's what compelled me to complete the Ironman in Hawaii.

Tap into the mental side of your sport

Have an open mind when it comes to business. If you see something that you're really excited about, pursue it. Immerse yourself in that business. Treat it the same way as you would in sports. We're all analytical by nature. We became strong at our respective sports for a number of different reasons. It was the things that you did when no one else was watching. The times you were alone in the gym, the times you were out there training and digging in deeper than anybody else was. So that mental capacity, that mental strength that you've built over the years, that is the difference between someone who has the killer instinct in business and someone who doesn't. The business leaders who have no background in sports? They share that mental aspect and edge that I'm talking about.

Always ask, "What's next?"

Opportunities like *Dancing With the Stars* or hosting *Minute To Win It*, they're not difficult to get into. Actually, they're much easier than my businesses. Those were brought along as, "Hey, what do you want to try next? What have you always wanted to do or try?" Whether it was dancing, hosting or broadcasting, all of those elements, I loved doing them, and I thought they were a lot of fun. Every time a manager calls me and he brings up a new deal or my agent calls me and says she thinks that I should try this, it's *never* how they describe it. Ever. Ever. It's nothing like it. Halfway through, I'm thinking, "I can't believe I signed up for this. I did not sign up for this." Then it always turns out to be spectacular and I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. For example, I tell all of my friends who are athletes who want to go on *Dancing With the Stars*, "I won't explain to you how hard it is, but you have no idea until you actually do it." ■



STYLING BY CHANDRA CHAVEZ
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LEATHER JACKET, JENNY
SCHWARTZ; DENIM JACKET,
KILL CITY; SHIRT, VINCE —
AVAILABLE AT NEIMAN MARCUS