

All roads lead to Rome

There is never only one way or one truth that leads to success. The route there is often very different. Individuals are unique; nobody is the same as anyone else. Every person has different inherited talents, has grown up in their own environment and has a different starting point on the route to success.

The job of the coach is to free the energy that is stored in every athlete. If the coach can help the athlete with inspiration, involvement, enthusiasm, motivation and self-confidence there is a good chance that this energy will be released positively and powerfully.

Encouraging the athlete, being sensitive toward the athlete, getting the athlete to think for herself, creating enthusiasm in the team, letting the individual be unique, seeing possibilities and being good judge of human nature are some of the qualities that successful orienteers have identified as important in a coach.

The following pages describe two international orienteers' paths from juniors to extremely successful seniors. Both of them have stood on top of the podium at WOC or world cup. Both of them have achieved a goal that many people strive towards – being the best.

The ways to success that they have taken are very different. Both have found their own solution, chosen their own route to success. The physical, technical and mental training they carry out is in many respects totally different. However there are several things that they have in common: Both are excellent map-readers, often include competition-like training in their schedules and are physically strong runners in forest terrain. Other characteristics they share in common are more to do with personality and psychology.

That both are focused, disciplined, determined, plan carefully and have good self-confidence is no coincidence. These factors probably lie at the heart of any attempt to succeed in any task, be it at work or in an orienteering race. Beyond that, the actual route that you find to success can be very individual. It is just a case of finding a way of doing things that is right for you...

Johan Ivarsson

Overall World Cup Winner 1996

What vision of your future as a senior orienteer did you have as a junior?

I am a very cautious person, a careful general, so to speak. I never had the vision like now I am going to be world champion. I have aimed towards it gradually. Every year since I started I have got a little better, right up until 1996. This year, 1997, things have not gone quite as well as last season.

During my last year as a junior the national team coach said that we juniors would have a hard time establishing ourselves in the senior team in our first years as seniors. Many of the best runners in the team at that time were born in 61, 62 and 63 - some of the best orienteering years Sweden has had in a long time. I decided of course that I would go out and show them... But I also realised that it was important to bide my time and plan for the future.

In my first year as a senior I decided to focus on the competitions where I thought I could perform best - the district champs and the Swedish night champs. I taught myself to succeed just when I wanted to. I controlled my own goals. For example, there is a points system in the different disciplines of the Swedish Champs. One of my goals was to get 10 points during my time as a senior, a mark of respectability. As it happened, I achieved this in my first year thanks to a victory at the night champs. I had to move the goalposts of course, so my long-term goal became to get 50 points instead. I managed that in 1994.

I have to have sensible goals that I can accept. Trying to be a bit better every year for example. Perhaps that is a passive stance to take, but that's the sort of person I am. The motivation for me has always been that it is such fun to orienteer, fun to train and fun to succeed with what you are striving towards. It gives me a kick. The process of achieving a goal is just as important as the goal itself. Feeling "this is a really good run here" as you punch the last control and then getting confirmation on the run-in that it was a great race - that is an amazing feeling. It gives a huge sense of satisfaction, a feeling of joy which goes right to your heart, a great experience.

I could arrive at a competition far out in the forest, with no prizes, no commentator but all the best runners there. Run the race, put up my time on a little paper slip on a homemade results list. That would be enough for me. The runner with the strongest inner motivation would win.

How have you combined studies and work with training and competing?

Thanks to a good base with a smaller Swedish club like OK Illern, then the elite club IK Hakarpspojkarna and going to a sixth form college in Eksjö that specialised in orienteering, I got a fantastic start to my orienteering career. In Eksjö I learnt how to train, developed my technique and socialised with like minded friends. After my military service year, I worked for one year before I started studying to be a civil engineer in Gothenburg. I finished my studies with one year in Trondheim. I finished my degree in the normal time, studying full time, and managed to develop as an orienteer at the same time. Despite being big universities I found that both institutions were receptive to combining studies and competitions. There was

also a good gang who trained together. I had, I found, loads of time to train. If you prioritise and structure your life, if you are systematic and disciplined, it is no problem to train 15-20 hours per week.

I would find it hard to be like the top cross country skiers and train and compete full time. There would be far too much time to kill. But sometimes I wonder why I was in such a rush with my studies, why I stressed and rushed through my studies at full speed. Perhaps I could have taken a year out, or taken a bit longer to finish my degree by spreading my courses out more.

Today I work for a firm of consultants in Oslo who deal with road projects. I have an understanding boss, also an orienteer, who helps and supports me in combining work with training and competing. I work full time, but when you consider extra leave I guess I work about 85 percent over the whole year.

Training programme - physical?

During the build-up period training happens every day, week in week out. I try to get a good balance of different types of training into the week: Two faster sessions, a real long session, mostly in the forest and then also some strength. A week during my time in Gothenburg might look something like this:

Monday	Steady running
Tuesday	Intervals
Wednesday	Faster run + circuits
Thursday	Fartlek
Friday	Steady running
Saturday	Long run
Sunday	Long run

When I arrived in Trondheim I got a real surprise. My training week, above, contained about 10-12 hours. Most people here, including the girls, trained much more than I did. I decided that I would try to increase the total training volume but still keep the quality sessions in my programme. To achieve this, I started to do a lot of cross-country skiing. I got a real kick from training more during my time in Trondheim. It was during this time that things really started going well, and my results got better.

As a junior I trained 8-9 hours per week, sometimes 10-12 hours. As a senior I train between 12-15 hours per week with peaks of 20 hours. In those weeks cross-country skiing, or other alternative training like cycling, makes up a large percentage of the volume. I feel however, that I did better quality training when I was a junior than I do now. Different environments have different philosophies. Sometimes it is difficult to make your own training fit in with club training. I try to train 2 times a week with the club, 1-2 times with someone else and the rest of the time I train on my own.

Running in water and cycling when I have been injured has been an important barrier for me to break. In the beginning it was exceptionally tedious training. But, after a while I got into it and even got a kick out of the training. I saw that the training was actually beneficial and I became stronger.

During the competition season, with an important competition at the weekend, a week can look something like this:

Monday	Easy running on paths
Tuesday	90 min steady pace in terrain
Wednesday	60 min orienteering technique
Thursday	Interval training, “2 minutes” or “70-20”
Friday	Rest
Saturday	30 min easy running
Sunday	Competition

I don’t do any alternative training during the competition season. I try to make the orienteering training I do relevant to the coming race or my main goal for the season so I like to do a lot of model training. I look at course planning and old maps which are relevant to the competition area. I go through everything mentally: technique and tactics, orienteering technique controlling the speed and also that I will dare to stop if uncertain, “grab the hand brake” if I need to.

During a competition I can sometimes be a bit passive on the last part of the course, but on the other hand I very rarely blow it near the end. Moreover, I start more strongly than most.

My tactic is based on taking one control at a time. I rarely look at the whole course and note that it is tough near the end. Past world champion, Kent Olsson once said: “Push it right from the start, and if things go well you’ll be able to keep going all the way to the finish.” I try to check route choices for the next control if I can, but not at all costs. If I need to I will take ten seconds extra at the control.

Training philosophy - orienteering technique?

During my time at orienteering sixth form college I enjoyed nothing more than technique training. Lots of people thought that I was a bit strange as I did so very much technical training. I often set off on my own to train in a detailed area, just to get a feel for the terrain and how it was represented on the map. I learned how to interpret contour shapes and how the map reflects reality. I trained up my map-reading skills into a very sharp tool.

During my time as a junior I did a lot of exercises focusing on a particular technique, for example control picking or compass. Today I run whole courses more, often from important competitions like past Swedish champs or old selection races. If I run a whole course like this, then I’ll do it at competition speed. Other orienteering sessions can be done at a slower tempo.

Training philosophy - mental?

I am a calm and focused person both at work and in the forest. I think I am good at tolerating stress when the day of the competition arrives. I am not at all nervous, but the evening before when it’s time to sleep (especially before relays) I often find it difficult to relax. When I run the race though, I dare to trust in myself - I think I have strong self-confidence. I am disciplined, whenever I am uncertain, I stop.

Last year I was the best. That little spark that you need to be the best has died a bit during this year. I think I need to make new goals to strive for otherwise I will lose that decisive motivation.

I make a list of all my competitions. I note down different factors which influence my competition result, using a simple code +,0,-. Things like hassle at school, stressful journeys, or a feeling of harmony before the race with everything clicking into place - those are perhaps the most important factors which can influence my result. Motivation and physical shape are other important aspects of course, if I am going to arrive at the race ready for a good performance.

Best training session?

Running fast and getting tired out is a kick, for example interval sessions. Or when a fast technique session a few days before an important race goes well, everything flows, then I get a real feeling of self-confidence for the coming race. That is a really great feeling.

Five qualities which make you a top orienteer?

Determined - if I start something, then I want to see it through to the end. I have retired in two competitions, the Swedish long champs because of the heat, and a night race when my headlamp went out.

Systematic and structured - I am good at prioritising and planning my work and training time. I am very systematic about planning work and my competition schedule, so that I get everything fitting into place before a race. I think however, that it is in my training that I am most systematic and thorough.

Accurate - I am best at night orienteering. Perhaps I am a little too careful and accurate sometimes, to the extent that I become passive and cautious.

Enthusiasm - orienteering is fun! Enthusiasm and joy in what you do are some of the most important building blocks for success, be it at work or in sport.

Self-confidence - I dare to trust in myself. I dare to do what I believe in, especially during orienteering competitions.

Advice to coaches

Roger Glanefors meant a great deal to me during my time at orienteering gymnasium. I learnt a lot about technique and how to train from him. Running with a big club like IK Hakarspojarna with Göran Öhlund at the helm was also very important for me. Taking the responsibility in decisive situations and being the start in the club gave me self-confidence and taught how to rise to the occasion and be the best when it counted.

A good coach starts with the athlete and discusses things to find out what they want. The relationship is extremely important. A good relationship makes the athlete feel very secure. There also has to be a balance between listening and giving sensible advice. Of course, when it comes to selection you have to be professional, separate the facts from personalities.

Advice to juniors aiming higher?

Dare to stand still in the forest. Try the tactic that Kent Olsson and I have used: Stop as soon as you are unsure. You need to learn to orienteer at the speed that you compete at. Let the map reading dictate your speed, not the other way round. During 1994-96 I guess I ran ten competitions where I missed less than half a minute in total.

When you stand on the start line, regardless of how your training has gone, or what injuries you may have had, do your best. Forget about things in past.

In 1986 I had a string of bad results that made take stock and think again about my technique. I had won the O-ringen and had a good season in general. I was a little doubtful and with hindsight I didn't do what I wanted to do myself. I ran the district champs straight after the O-ringen and should have stayed at home. The selection races for the Nordics next weekend also went badly, and even the weekend after that. I decided that it wasn't cool any more. It was more fun to be a steady fifth all the time and run a good orienteering race, than it was to win a competition then run badly for four or five races in a row. My new tactic became:

I am going to stop at every control and before I run on to the next control I am going to think a "mantra". My mantra or trigger phrase was "Micke Wehlin". He was a runner in the Swedish senior team and at the time he was the best orienteering technician I knew. He basically never made mistakes! So, at every control I thought "Micke Wehlin" and my thoughts focused on the job again: Orienteering. This was a turning point for me. Now I was thinking about technique all the time during races.

Motivation gives concentration. My motivation is to have a perfect run. That is what pays dividends in the long run. Of course, you have to be pleased when you have good runs. My idea of a perfect run includes a few stops. I let the technique control my running speed the whole time. When I start thinking about trying to run faster, or that I need to fight a bit, I start to lose focus on the most important thing (orienteering technique) and think about less important things (physical feelings). Your speed is always high enough when the orienteering is going well. Even if the speed isn't there at first, it will come, be it in three weeks, three months or three years. Always put technique before speed.

Learn from others. Read the orienteering literature that is out there. For example, I have read books by Kent Olsson, Marita Skogum and Christer Rolf and found loads of gems in them.

Would you change anything that you regret?

One thing I think have done which I think is good is moving around: Småland, Göteborg, Trondheim and Oslo. I have a wider experience thanks to the different training environments, both terrain and training partners.

I wish that I been more committed to orienteering when I was studying and that I was a bit more focused with my training earlier as a junior. I wish that I had given even more to orienteering then, and aimed a bit higher.

Heather Monro

Overall bronze medallist World Cup 2000

What vision of your future as a senior orienteer as a junior?

I don't really think I had a vision of how things would be in the future when I was a junior. There is no way that I ever imagined that I would do so well: I didn't have a mental picture of myself standing on the World Cup podium this year or anything like that when I was 17. I think the goalposts move all the time.

I was also lucky to get a chance to a taste of senior international competition early – I was picked for a World Cup when I was 19. I did terribly of course, but I suppose it gave me some insight into what was required and inspired me to come back and do better.

The difference between now and then is enormous - in my training, my commitment to orienteering, even the country I live in! But all of those things have come gradually. Each lifestyle change, whether it was taking a year out before school, or deciding to work in Norway for a while after university was quite a small decision at the time. My training has also developed steadily so that even though I do about twice as much as I used to when I was a junior, and train in a totally different way, there has been no single massive change. Success has followed each change that I have made, but not straight away. Improved results have usually come some time after I have changed my training or lifestyle.

If there is a vision that has followed me, I guess it is that orienteering is really great fun. I enjoy it so much that I can't ever see myself stopping, even though I won't be an elite orienteer forever. I always want to be a little bit better than last time, improve a little on the last year. It was the same when I was a junior – I never thought about giving up because there was always another race to go to or another camp to meet friends on. I couldn't give up now either – it's just too much fun!

How have you combined work and studies with training and competition?

I think this has been one of the most important aspects for me. Even though the changes have come slowly, I can definitely link all the steps I have made in my orienteering to changes in my environment, studies or work. For example, I decided to take a year out after school and spend a lot of time orienteering. I'm really glad I did that now – I travelled around and got a lot of experience of different countries and racing abroad. I worked a bit and stayed at home between travelling. It was the first time that I had really put orienteering first, and I had a great time doing it.

When I went to Cambridge the year after I found it tough. I had to be very disciplined to fit everything in. In some ways a university like that is very supportive of sport. They approve of excellence, so if someone is good at sport they really appreciate it. But on the other hand there is a very rigid framework and it can be hard for a sportsperson to fit into that. If there have been Saturday lectures in your college for the last 300 years they are not going to move them

just because you want to go training. Tradition makes the system inflexible, but it also taught me to use my time effectively.

The good thing about Cambridge was the people who were around. I trained a lot with the athletics and cross-country clubs during my time there. I even rowed a bit in my first year, but that was just for fun. I developed a good training routine and enjoyed being part of a team as well as just an individual. Although I look back at some of the training I did and question its relevance now, I certainly developed a good base of fitness and improved my running. I wonder if I could run some of the times I ran on the track now!

After finishing university I worked at an outdoor centre in the Lakes. Really it was just a chance to think about what I wanted to do in the longer term. I had a few romantic ideas about what fun it would be to live and train in the Lakes, but I actually found it quite lonely. I did most of my training on my own. During that year I was also in contact with a Norwegian club - Yvette Baker and Dickie Jones were also running for them at that time. I was really inspired when I got to run in the big relays such as Tio-Mila and Jukola, and when I later got the chance to work as an au pair in Norway I leapt at it.

However, things still felt quite temporary at that time. I had not decided what I would do in the longer term and was applying for jobs and courses in Britain. The town I was in at first in Norway was beautiful and great for training, but I was still quite isolated in many ways. My plans became more concrete when I moved to Halden. It seemed a perfect combination - better training opportunities, but also a big club and plenty of contact with other orienteering friends, like I had at Cambridge. When I later started a three-year teaching degree there in 1996 I guess I had really decided that my longer-term plans lay in Norway.

The difference between my two degrees was enormous. In Norway, there was a much better understanding of elite sport and I was able to move exams or ask for extensions on projects if I needed extra time to train or compete. In my final year, I even delayed the last part of my course by six months so that I could focus on World Champs in Scotland. I have also got a lot of flexibility in my current job. I work part time, and I am able to plan my work to some extent to take account of important races or training camps. I really feel that I have got a good balance between orienteering and work now.

Training philosophy - physical?

When I was at Cambridge I trained mainly with runners. I was very fit, but I don't think I was really training to be a good runner in the forest. There was also a big focus on miles. The measure of how hard you trained was how many miles you had in your training diary. A lot of the running I did was probably junk mileage. But I learnt how to push myself and build up a routine and the discipline that I would need later to carry out a hard training programme. I week in Cambridge usually looked a bit like this:

Monday	jogging + circuits
Tuesday	intervals on a football pitch (5 x 4 mins)
Wednesday	long run on paths
Thursday	intervals (6 x 800m)
Friday	jogging
Saturday	XC race

Sunday	orienteering race
--------	-------------------

I would often jog in the morning for half an hour or so, with other runners, or even go out for a steady jog in the evening after a race on Saturday. I don't really think that those jogs contributed anything to my training, apart from making me feel better about my weekly total!

Now I try to train much more in the forest, try to include a lot more technique, and have made my quality sessions much longer. Instead of jogging to pass the time, I go to the gym and work on my strength and flexibility. When I'm doing long sessions, I either go for proper long runs in the terrain or I cross train, biking or cross-country skiing for example. By cross training I can give my body a rest and still get a good aerobic session. Even though my training volume is much higher than it used to be, I think there is much less junk mileage in my training now. A hard week in the winter might look something like this:

Monday	(am) Interval training with a map (50 x "45-15") (pm) Spinning class + Gym work
Tuesday	Interval training on the roads (12 x "180-60")
Wednesday	Spinning class + Gym work
Thursday	(am) Rowing (pm) Intervals on a hilly sawdust trail (12 x "180-60")
Friday	Night orienteering
Saturday	(am) Rowing (pm) Gym work
Sunday	Long orienteering course

I have really gone in for what we call Foxdal intervals. By slightly reducing the intensity of my interval training, I am able to do much longer quality sessions and this has had a big effect on my fitness. I spend more a lot of time in the forest running at competition speed.

Things like the spinning class are good for aerobic fitness, and I find it a sociable way to train that gives me a break from running, so that I've got more energy left for the really important tough sessions. The rowing is just a bit of fun – our orienteering club are going to enter a race next spring. But is also a nice way to build up a bit of team spirit and train at the same time. Later in the winter I might ski instead. The core of the week is the running sessions. Pretty much all the running sessions I do are hard so I make sure that I warm up and warm down thoroughly.

Training Philosophy – Technique?

I do a lot more technique training now. Technique training when I was a junior was just something I did at the weekends but now it has a much higher priority in my weekly programme. The biggest difference however, isn't the amount that I do, but the way I do it.

I think there is much more quality in my technique training now. I really consider what I want to get out of each session and then concentrate on doing it right. I am very goal orientated. When I went on training weekends before, I used to run round courses without thinking about what I was really trying to practise. I used to make lots of mistakes and never really analyse why things sometimes went right and sometimes went wrong. A lot of the time I was training in bad habits.

Now I have a plan for different times of the year and know exactly what I want to focus on when. I make sure that I do things correctly, so that I practise good habits and learn the behaviour that I want to reproduce in a race. I also think about my training afterwards. I don't mean that I analyse every course in detail, but I reflect on what went well and why. Last year I kept a little graph of how many controls I was happy with on my main technique training session each week. I watched my percentage success rate climb through the year until, by the time the most important races came round, I was really happy with my technique. Better quality in my technique training has made a massive difference - I miss far less now and that is the key to doing well.

Training Philosophy - Mental?

I am a real geek actually! I could sit and study maps for hours. I become absorbed in preparations for important races in the future, thinking about the demands of the orienteering and planning my physical and technical training to meet those demands. I am a very thorough person who doesn't like to leave things to chance. If we discuss terrain or a race at a club or team meeting I often get very involved in the discussion or even sit and take notes.

I think I am quite structured in my daily life as well. I am a lists person, even if they are only in my head. I never get out of bed and just float around; I always know what I am going to do with the day. That means I am quite effective and I guess that is very important as an elite sportsperson – you need to be effective if you are going to make time for everything. But sometimes I am aware that my need for preparation and structure is a little bit of a weakness. A lot of things in orienteering are unexpected for example and require flexibility. On the other hand the more you plan for the unexpected the better prepared you are – a lot of the surprises in orienteering are really quite predictable.

I like to have harmony in my life and my orienteering. My environment contributes a lot to how I feel about my training and performance. I like to feel that people around me such as my club mates, boyfriend or family support what I am doing for example. I also like to feel that the people who I am working with have the same goals and want to work in the same way as I do to achieve them. Sometimes in a team situation that can be a bit difficult - not everyone wants to do things in the same way. I think my need for structure is a bit of a weakness in those situations.

I also work with what most people would regard as mental training: Relaxation, concentration, visualisation and so on. I think this helps me focus on what I need to do in stressful situations. As I have become more experienced I have become better at leaving external factors behind when I stand on the start line. Although harmony in my life is still important to me, I am good at focusing on job in hand when I actually get into the forest.

Best Training Session?

I don't look forward to interval training or particularly enjoy it as I do it. But there is a definite rush afterwards, a feeling of having worked hard, that gives me a real sense of satisfaction. I think my favourite sessions are with maps actually. There is nothing better than running fast in open, detailed forest and feeling in total command as you spike every control.

Five qualities that make you a top orienteer?

Thorough – I plan thoroughly and don't leave anything to chance. My training and preparations make sure I am ready to perform when I stand on the start line.

Discipline – I never have any problems training hard. I can always get off the sofa and out the door, even on the darkest winter night.

Enthusiasm – I enjoy what I do. I love to orienteer and that gives me a lot of positive energy to train and race. I rarely get tired of orienteering, even when I do it a lot.

Running – I am physically strong. I have always been a fast runner, and now I am also a strong runner in the forest, even in tough terrain.

Determined – I work steadily towards my goals. I am good at setting targets and working out a strategy to achieve them. If I decided on something, I can and will achieve it.

Advice to coaches?

Focus on the positive things. We are very good at analysing mistakes or finding problems – not fit enough, not enough training, not concentrated. Especially with girls I think it is important to motivate and encourage. I have learnt much more when the things I have done well in the forest have been pointed out and reinforced, than I have when people have analysed my mistakes.

Advice to juniors aiming higher?

You need to have patience! There are a couple of trend breakers in British orienteering, but for most of us international success has been a long and slow process. Concentrate on where you are now and how you can be better next race, next month, next year, not how you can be World Champion in five years.

Most importantly, do it because you enjoy it. Let the goalposts move naturally and enjoy the smaller successes that you may have along the way. So many of my friends from junior years have given up. There are a lot of different reasons, but if you are only motivated by success then of course not everyone can win and you may be disappointed. Never forget just how much fun orienteering is!

Any regrets?

No actually. Now that I think of it, I don't think I really regret anything. Of course I have made plenty of mistakes in and out of the forest, but I have learnt a lot from all of them. Everything I have done contributes to better performances in the future.

I definitely don't regret any of the big changes I have made in my life either. Leaving my Cambridge degree and all its possibilities behind and moving to a little town in Norway to orienteer might seem like a crazy decision. But, I have really lived life and followed what I wanted to do deepest down in my heart.