

# Athlete rituals a theater of the bizarre

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## *Deutsche Welle:*

Michael Phelps may be known for winning a record 22 Olympic medals. What's less known is that whenever he gets ready to race, he walks to the starting block, takes off his headphones that have been blasting Michael Jackson, and swings his arms three times.

Before tennis player Serena Williams won gold in women's singles, she took her shower sandals to the court, tied her shoelaces in a specific way and bounced the ball five times, as she has in every competition for more than 15 years. She also wore the same pair of socks she had been wearing throughout the Olympics, like she does at every tournament.

Athletes are often a superstitious lot. Despite quantum leaps in science and massive training budgets, sportsmen and women of all skill levels swear by superstitions and elaborate rituals to enhance their performance.

"They feel more secure when doing these things," said Dr. Jens Kleinert, a Sports Psychology professor at the German Sports University Cologne. "It can be a way for them to concentrate."

As an example, Kleinert cited Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, who is known for pointing to the sky dramatically before each race. One minute, Kleinert said, Bolt could be hamming it up with reporters or spectators. The next minute, he's in "concentration mode."

Read the whole story: [Deutsche Welle](#)