

Olympians Don't Quit

Did you ever want to give up because something happened that made your goal harder to achieve? It has happened to Olympians, too.

Dutch athlete Fanny Blankers-Koen, age 22, was looking forward to the 1940 Olympic Games, sure she would win the gold as a sprinter. But World War II came along, and both the 1940 and the 1944 Olympic Games were canceled. She continued training, gave birth to a son and a daughter, and looked forward to the 1948 games. By that time Fanny was 30, much older than the other sprinters. She won the 100-meter dash and the 80-meter hurdles, only to be mobbed by reporters who would not let her rest for her remaining events. Yet she went on to win the 200-meter race and was a member of the winning 4 x 100-meter relay. Fanny was the first woman ever to have won four track and field gold medals in the same Olympiad.

In 1938, Hungarian army sergeant Karoly Takacs was a member of his national pistol shooting team and expected to win in the 1940 Olympic Games, but a tragic accident happened. While he was on maneuvers, a hand grenade exploded, leaving Karoly without his right hand, his shooting hand. His hopes for gold dashed, Takacs was allowed to remain in the army, despite his disability. He was severely depressed, but he began training again with a pistol, this time using his left hand. At the 1948 Olympic Games, Captain Takacs stood on the winner's platform wearing his gold medal for pistol shooting. He won it with his left hand, the hand he had never used for shooting prior to the accident ten years earlier.

Ray Ewry of Lafayette, Indiana, was paralyzed as a child and spent much of his childhood in a wheelchair. Doctors believed that he would never walk again. He devoted hours to exercise and not only walked, but developed great strength in his legs. He won the three jumping events at Paris in 1900 at the age of 26, repeated his performance at St. Louis in 1904, and once again swept the jumping events at the 1908 Olympic Games in London.

When Wilma Rudolph was four, she caught scarlet fever and pneumonia. It was thought she would never walk again. Yet, her mother drove her long distances to therapy, and her brothers and sisters spent many hours massaging her useless legs. By age six, she was walking in special shoes. But Wilma did not stop there. In high school, she starred in basketball. Switching to track, she made the Olympic Games team in 1956 and won two bronze medals. In 1960, she returned from the Games with three gold medals. She was a winner personally, too, being one of the most popular athletes of all time.

Like most boys growing up in Flint, Michigan, trying out for Little League was an important part of life for young Jim Abbott. The fact that he did not have a right hand made no difference. At an early age he had learned to pitch and bat lefthanded. When catching a ball in the field, he wore the glove on his left hand, quickly switching it to his right as he threw the runners out. At the University of Michigan, Jim pitched his way to many honors, including the Big Ten Player of the Year. As a member of the 1988 Olympic Games team, he made two appearances on the mound. In the final game against Japan, he pitched a complete game to clinch the gold medal for the USA. He was no longer thought of as a player with one hand. Although Jim had reached his lifetime goal of earning an Olympic Games gold medal, he continued his athletic career by pitching in professional Major League Baseball.

Olympians Don't Quit (cont.)

Directions: In the following word search you will find words related to the lives of several Olympians who never gave up. The words are hidden horizontally, vertically, diagonally, forward, and backward. Circle the words and place them in the paragraphs on the following page to retell the stories of these great athletes.



Cross off the words as you find them: gold, Abbott, right, lefthanded, Michigan, Wilma, Big Ten, Japan, track, victory, wheelchair, London, thirty, bronze, Saint Louis, basketball, field, pistol, shoot, podium, walk, Ewry, Takacs, world war, Paris, three, leg, Fanny

Olympians Don't Quit (cont.)

Directions: Using the words found in the preceding word search, fill in the blanks below and retell the stories of these great athletes.

_____ pitcher Jim _____ led his team at the University of _____ and was named outstanding player in the _____. He pitched his USA team to _____ over _____ in the 1988 Games.

_____ Rudolph showed her family and friends that indeed she would _____ again. She starred in high school _____ and went out for _____. She won two Olympic _____ medals in 1956 and returned to win _____ gold medals in 1960.

Roy _____ left his _____ and exercised to develop great _____ strength. He became an outstanding jumper and swept those events in the _____ Games of 1900 and repeated his performance in the following Olympic Games at _____ and _____.

_____ Blankers-Koen missed two Olympic Games because of _____. In 1948, at age _____, she became the first woman to win four _____ and _____ events.

In 1938, Karoly _____ looked forward to winning the gold medal in _____ shooting. In a tragic accident, he lost his _____ hand. Rather than give up his sport, he taught himself to _____ with his other hand, and in the 1948 Olympic Games he stood on the _____ with a _____ medal around his neck.

Answer Key (cont.)

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Immediate Effects

Good: aggressiveness leading to harder training, some muscle buildup

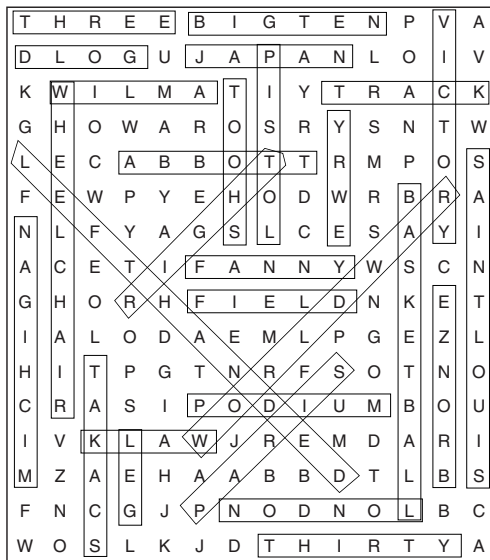
Bad: “roid” rage, baldness, for women—deepening of voice and whiskers

Long-term Effects

Good: none

Bad: liver problems, cancer, reproductive system affected, bone growth slowed

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Left-handed, Abbott, Michigan, Big Ten, victory, Japan

Wilma, walk, basketball, track, bronze, three

Ewry, wheelchair, leg, Paris, Saint Louis, London,

Fanny, World War, thirty, track, field, Takacs, pistol, right, shoot, podium, gold

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