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Reading Article G2

Article #10: Gail Devers *by Arlene Bourgeois Molzahn*

"YOU'VE WORKED HARD FOR THIS. Go get it," Jackie Joyner-Kersey told her friend, Gail Devers, just before the 100-meter dash in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain.

Devers set her feet in the starting blocks and hoped that she would run a good race. The blast from the starter's gun sounded, and she burst forward. She ran down the track, using every ounce of strength in her body, and hurled herself across the finish line.

Then she waited. The race was so close that it looked as if at least five sprinters might have won.

The instant replay on the stadium scoreboard kept showing the five runners crossing the finish line. After the judges studied the finish-line photo, they found that Devers's shoulder had crossed the finish line first. Finally, the announcement came over the loudspeakers. Gail Devers had won the 100-meter dash in 10.82 seconds.

Then Devers experienced the highlight of any sprinter's career, as she stood on the huge platform in the giant stadium and received an Olympic gold medal.

Eighteen months earlier she wasn't thinking about running. She was hoping that she would be able to walk again.

Just four years earlier, in the summer of 1988, as Devers was training for the Olympic Games, to be held in Seoul, South Korea, she began to feel very tired all the time and failed to make the Olympic finals.

By 1991, she had lost some of her eyesight, most of her hair, and forty pounds in weight.

Her feet were covered with blisters, which made it too painful for her to walk. Her doctors really did not know what was wrong with her.

Then, just in time, a doctor discovered that Devers had Graves' disease. If she had gone two more days without proper medication, her doctors might have had to amputate her feet.

With new treatment, Devers began to recover. Soon she was well enough to begin training for the 1992 Olympic Games.

Gail Devers was born in Seattle, Washington, and grew up in San Diego, California. She and her brother were happy, although their parents were strict. At night they had to be in the house as soon as the streetlights came on. Their parents limited the amount of television the children could watch. They taught their children to feel good about themselves, to grow up to be independent; able to live their own lives.

After a successful high school track career at Sweetwater High School in National City, California, Devers enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles. Bob Kersee, who had become the track coach at the university, gave her much encouragement and told her she could be a world-class runner someday. He was right. After winning the Olympic gold medal in 1992, Devers brought her winning ways to the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. She won the 100-meter dash, was a member of the 4 _ 100-meter relay team that won the gold medal, and finished fourth in the 100-meter hurdles.

Gail Devers is a great runner and an excellent example of the meaning of the saying "Never give up."

"Use me as an example," Devers said. "When the walls are closing in, when someone doesn't know where to turn, tell people I was there. I kept going. So can others."

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