

The Importance of Hard Work

Wilma Rudolph was diagnosed with polio at the age of five. Doctors said she would never walk. But her mother, her 21 siblings, and her own discipline and willpower changed all that.

After years of therapy and wearing a metal brace, at age 12 Wilma decided to take the brace off and try walking without it. Not only could she walk, but she began to play basketball also! A coach from Tennessee State University invited her to run on the college's track team before she had graduated high school.

Wilma was so fast she qualified for the 1956 Olympics, where she won a bronze medal in the 400-meter relay. In 1960, Wilma qualified for the Olympics again. She became the first woman to ever win three gold medals at an Olympics. The next time that feat was accomplished was in 1988, by runner Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

Wilma went from struggling to walk with a leg brace to being known as "the fastest woman in the world." She won many sports awards, including the Associated



Wilma Rudolph at the finish line during 50 yard dash at track meet in Madison Square Garden

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Press Woman Athlete of the Year award in 1960. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1994, the same year she died of brain cancer.

Her sports achievements were great but Wilma's life was filled with many accomplishments. Upon returning home from the Rome Olympics in 1960, she refused to attend her hometown celebration if it was segregated; so that event became the first integrated event ever in Clarksville, Tennessee. And Wilma established the Wilma Rudolph Foundation, whose purpose was to help children learn the importance of hard work and discipline. ■