

Through determined eyes: A glimpse of love, dreams and struggles

It only seemed like yesterday when the eyes across the world were fixed on China and its Olympic Games. It is hard to believe that seven long years have passed since the Olympic Games were awarded to China in 2001.

The Olympics captured our hearts and minds during the span of merely a few weeks. I, for one, tuned in to these Games. What I received was not just the truly incredible performance that athletes and the host country China have put on, but I witnessed, quite unexpectedly, a positive global unification and how it instilled hope and courage in the hearts of many men and women across the world.

With the Beijing Olympics wrapped up in August, it seems that for a moment people are shifting their focuses off sports. However, the stories and struggles of these amazing athletes will remain in history for many years to come. The Beijing Olympics served not only as a stage for the spectacular show of national glory and power of China to the world, but was also a unique display of the sportsmanship of these athletes. We saw their road to success, the obstacles encountered, the tears they shed, the unwavering determination they had to overcome difficulties to ultimately, reach their goals.

I believe these stories will prove to be an invaluable lesson to people across the globe, regardless of their age, race, gender and all the other differences that set us apart. The central and core values of sports are and have always been an iconic symbol of peace, harmony and friendship. Back in ancient Greece, countries that are at war had a tradition of ceasing fire for once, to attend the ancient Olympic Games.

We see that sports in many ways defined the fundamental values that human beings believe in, and these exact values have gone through the test of time to flourish even in today's modern society. Therefore, I believe that these athletes sets a great example for people of all walks of life, but especially to those who are undergoing challenges and are confronted with obstacles.

It must be acknowledge that not all athletes garner praise and respect at the end of day, despite going through the worst of conditions and has fought the most gruesome battles to get that once in a lifetime experience. However, as opposed to what the saying goes, the end never justifies the means. At the end of day, it is and has always been the sweat and toil that athletes go through on a daily basis that deserves our applause.

Recounting the heartwarming stories that have been on display to the world during the Beijing Olympics, it is hard to believe that some people have indeed been thrust with unimaginable difficulties and incredible obstacles, but with steadfast and resolute determination, eventually overcome one and another difficulty.

Samia Yusuf Omar, a frail looking teenager at the mere age of seventeen, walked into Beijing as one of the two representatives of a small country by the name of Somalia. She had no money for facilities or training, reflecting an enormous contrast and showing the huge divergence between Somalia and other rich countries that have poured countless sums of money, resources and manpower to the cause of winning more medals.

Her road however, has not been smooth. Samia Yusuf Omar, being a Muslim, had received threats telling her that a Muslim woman's place is at home, not in sports. However, she boldly decided against these traditional views and walked into the arena with courageous strides and with an audacious heart. She participated in the two hundred meter race heats, wearing a loose t-shirt, not even tugged. Not unexpectedly, she came last in the race. However, she garnered the applause of thousands of audience there in the stadium and everywhere all across the televised world.

In the end, she took home not a single medal, but she was right there, in the middle of it all. What was on show was an unadulterated representation of love for the sport, a love that transcends all the difficulties that one may encounter in its quest. No gloss, no shine, but a positive and encouraging message brought to people watching everywhere, to never give up your dreams no matter what stands in your way.

Another electrifying tale of courage and perseverance was that of the overage women, German gymnast Oksana Chusovitina, a mother in the middle her life. At the age of thirty three, she may be considered young in many eyes, but in the world of gymnastics, that is considered as well overage. However, Chusovitina had to go to the Beijing Olympics.

Her nine year old son, Alisher, was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia. Although she had limited money, the family needed to sustain the livelihood of their child and they had to seeking advanced medical treatment for their son. Chusovitina and her husband accepted an offer of help from the head coaches of the Toyota Cologne Club, and moved to Germany, where she continued to train as a gymnast despite being well overage. For the sake of her sick child, she went to the Beijing Olympics.

Ultimately, Chusovitina competed with athletes nearly half her age, and proudly captured the silver medal in the event of women's vault. Currently, Chusovitina holds the record for the most individual World Championships medals on a single event. She is also one of only a handful of women to return to high-level gymnastics and various international competitions after bearing a child and becoming a mother.

With prize money earned from gymnastics competitions, along with other aid from the community who fundraised and donated to their cause, Chusovitina was able to secure treatment for Alisher.

Chusovitina is remarkable in her ability to remain competitive for so many years, in the face of great adversity and crunching obstacles. She has been cited as a role model and was an inspiration in the eyes of many gymnasts and also people across the globe. With courage and determination, she defied standards and predictions, and surmounted what was deemed to be insurmountable. She beat the odds and prevailed.

To conclude, the above two tales are just a very small fragment of the entire picture, but the story of these athletes, embodying the true spirit of these Games, are surely to be

ranked as two of the most inspirational and encouraging tales that the world has witnessed throughout these weeks.

In this twenty first century, the true essence of sports have inevitably been altered and splotted with patches of materialistic wants, political and economical gains and other aspects that should rightfully be deemed as less significant. However, the success and struggles, tears and laughter, ups and downs, sweat and toil that athletes have to go through with never be undermined.

This provides more the reason for us to learn from these athletes. In times of difficulty and despair, always remember that someone has gone through worse, and has survived. This is because in the end, it is that very spirit that will propel us to move forward, even in the harshest challenges and in the darkest hours.