

## A glance back toward the starting line

Throughout the years, I've realized that life can be unpredictable and a person can never really know what hurdle will fall into his or her path. From disappointing athletic performances to overwhelming health crises, I've definitely had my fair share of obstacles to overcome.

But there's one thing I've learned during these challenging times — you can never give up or get down on yourself. A true champion keeps his or her chin up and always takes life one race at a time. This is how I keep focused on my goals and racing toward my dreams.

### Finding my stride

I was born on Nov. 19, 1966 in Seattle, Wash. But my family later moved to National City, Calif., a small town near San Diego. Although I was born in the Pacific Northwest, Southern California is where I call “home.”

Since I was a young girl, I've always been a runner. In fact, my brother Parenthesis (PD), used to race me and then tease me when I lost. Well one day, I decided I just wasn't going to lose anymore. So I started practicing — and it paid off. I beat PD the next time we raced, and he never raced me again. From then on, running was all that mattered. I had found my stride.

I ran all throughout high school and was heavily recruited by major universities. I chose the University of California at Los Angeles and joined UCLA's track team where the 100-meter dash and 100-meter hurdles became my top events. In fact, I set an American record in the 100-meter hurdles during my senior year in 1988. And I've continued to break my record — most recently on July 23, 2000. In addition to my track and field success, I also enjoyed academic success at UCLA — I earned a bachelor's degree in sociology.

### Beating the odds

Despite my athletic success, 1988 was also the year I encountered one of the toughest challenges of my life. While training for the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, my health began to deteriorate. I suffered migraine headaches, sleeplessness, fainting spells and frequent vision loss. I should have been at my peak performance. Instead, I was constantly exhausted and my body felt out of control.

At first I blamed my condition on the pressures of Olympic training. But I soon found out that I had Graves' disease, a debilitating chronic thyroid disorder. During this time my feet became so blistered and swollen, the skin cracked and bled. The excruciating pain forced me to stop running. The doctors were sure they'd have to amputate both of my feet. I was devastated. Deep down, I was scared to death that my life as an athlete was over.

But I wasn't going to give up - the word "quit" has never been part of my vocabulary. With lots of hard work, determination, perseverance and faith in God, I was able to resume training and regain my health. In 1992, less than 17 months after the doctors had considered amputating my feet, I won my first gold medal in the 100-meter dash at the Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, and was named the "World's Fastest Woman." I knew I was back!

### **Crossing the finish line**

During 1993, I continued my winning streak, earning seven championship titles. At the world championships in Stuttgart, Germany, I accomplished a feat that hadn't been achieved in 45 years — I won both the 100-meter dash and 100-meter hurdles. Then in 1995, I secured the No. 1 U.S. ranking for the 100-meter hurdles after winning the National Champion and World Champion titles.

During the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta, I repeated my 1992 performance by winning the gold medal in the 100-meter dash, becoming only the second woman to win the prestigious event at two consecutive Olympics. I was also on the gold medal-winning 4x100 meter relay team.

The 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, was predicted to be my time to shine. But, once again, life threw me an unexpected hurdle. While I was training for the Sydney games, I suffered more setbacks. I injured my right Achilles tendon and left hamstring, which sidelined me for nearly two months. I pulled through and won the 100-meter hurdles at the U.S. Olympic Trials, lowering my American record with the event's fastest time in eight years. However, the injuries resurfaced in Sydney and I was forced to pull out of the race.

### **Becoming a champion**

Whenever faced with a challenge, I dig deep within myself and summon my spiritual and physical forces. This gives me the focus, determination, perseverance and support I need to succeed. Without this motivation, positive attitude and faith, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish such feats as winning two gold medals at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, launching the Gail Devers Foundation or giving back to help others inspire positive change within their communities. I'm excited about what the future holds, and I plan to share what I've learned with others through writing and public speaking activities.

When I look at what I've accomplished during my life thus far, I realize I've been truly blessed. Now I want to share my good fortune by passing it on and helping others. Then, I'll consider myself a true champion.

## Snapshot of Career Highlights

- 2000-wins 100 meter hurdles at U.S. Olympic track and field trials in Sacramento, Ca., setting a new American record, 12.33 seconds, making her the fourth fastest ever in this event.
- 1999-wins a gold medal and sets new American record in the 100-meter hurdles at the World Championships in Seville, Spain (12.37) Ranked No. 1 in the world in 100-meter hurdles
- 1996-wins two gold medals (100-meter dash and 4x100-meter relay) at the Olympic games in Atlanta, Ga.
- 1995-secures National Champion and World Champion titles and No. 1 ranking in the United States for 100-meter hurdles
- 1994-wins U.S. Outdoor Championship title
- 1993-wins the 100-meter dash and 100-meter hurdles at the World Championships in Stuttgart, Germany, sets American record in 100 meter hurdles (12.46)
- 1992-wins a gold medal in the 100-meter dash at the Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain, which earns the title “World's Fastest Woman”
- 1991-finishes second at the World Championships in Tokyo, sets American record in 100-meter hurdles (12.48), Berlin, Germany
- 1988-wins the NCAA 100-meter dash and sets an American record (12.61 seconds) in the 100- meter hurdles
- 1987-88-named PAC-10 Athlete of the Year while attending UCLA