

# *Never Give Up*

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Life requires commitment. When I think of commitment, I think of a young, crippled black child by the name of Wilma. She was born premature with polio at only four and one half pounds on a ghetto farm in the backwoods of Tennessee.

At the age of four, she was stricken with double pneumonia and scarlet fever. The deadly combination left her with a paralyzed and useless left leg. Doctors told her mother “the child will never walk.” Her mom’s only response was a line from a favorite hymn, “Wilma can climb her highest mountain if she’ll do it one step at a time.

Her first step was a very painfully massaged step. They had to teach her to walk with a steel brace. After five torturous years, Wilma was able to take a step without the brace. The next five years were spent developing that step into a smooth, rhythmic stride.

On her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, Wilma joined the track team. They called her “limpy Wilma,” because she came in last in every single race. She would shout above the laughter of her teammates, “I’ll never give up... I promise you, I’ll never give up!”

One day she came in next to last in a race and on another occasion she finished second from last. One day she was second from first and one day she won herself a race. Finally, she won every single race she entered in the entire meet and that day, she won herself a new nickname, “lightening Wilma.”

“Lightening” came to the attention of Coach Ed Temple at Tennessee State University. He said, “Wilma, come with me, I’ll coach you.” Wilma said, “if running will get me an education, not only will I come to your school but I’ll run harder and faster than I’ve ever run in my life- I promise you, I’ll never give up!”

Now away at school, Wilma would have to draw her motivation from within. Her inspiration, her mother, died. But Wilma did have the ability to motivate herself, because in 1960, Coach Ed Temple picked her to represent the USA in the Olympics in Rome.

Those who were in the stadium that year thought that Wilma looked a little bit lonely. She was an unknown black athlete. She walked with a noticeable limp. Many were asking the question aloud, “What’s she doing here?” It took the exactly 11 seconds to get the answer because when the starting pistol cracked, she tore up the cinder path in a world record 11 seconds to capture her first Gold Medal in the 100 meter dash.

**Her second race was the 200 meter dash and everyone knew that Germany's Yetta Hynie would win this race. She held the World Record and was heavily favored. Everyone but Wilma thought that.**

**Again, the starting pistol cracked. Wilma and Yetta jumped to the lead and turned the race into a fighting duel. With a burst of speed on the backstretch, Wilma pushed out the lead, snapped the tape and captured her second Gold Medal.**

**Several days later, Wilma would be competing against a revenge-seeking Yetta Hynie. The race was the 400-meter relay and once again, everyone knew the German foursome would capture this event. They held the World Record and no one would dare challenge them, no one except the Americans.**

**Again, the starting pistol cracked. The Germans and the Americans both jumped out to a commanding lead. The first runners handed the batons to the second, the second to the third. When the third runners handed their batons to Wilma and Yetta, they were in a dead heat, side by side. However, Wilma dropped her baton, and the great German Yetta Hynie raced all alone for what appeared to be a sure victory.**

**No one knows what happened in that next instant. Wilma was hopelessly behind. With less than ten seconds to go, she reached down and picked up the baton and in what Olympic historians have come to call a miracle today, she pulled up beside the great German Yetta Hynie. The two raced neck-and-neck, stride-for-stride to the finish line. One hundred thousand screaming fans were yelling "Go Wilma! Go!"**

**The rest is Olympic history. Slowly Wilma pushed out to the lead, snapped the tape and captured her third Gold Medal- the first American woman in the history of the Olympics ever to have done so.**

**The message I leave with my audiences is to never give up. When I think of this, I can't help but think of Wilma- *Wilma Rudolph!***

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