

# Track and Field



*Wilma Rudolph*



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## Wilma Rudolph

### A Fairy Tale

"One of the reasons why I'm fast is probably that as a kid I had to move very quickly when my mother called us to eat. My father wasn't rich and there were nineteen of us children to feed." The story of Wilma Rudolph, Olympic women's sprint champion and possibly the most graceful woman athlete ever to tread a running track, has a fairy tale quality. She was the seventeenth of nineteen children and at the age of four was struck down by polio, which paralyzed both her legs. Her mother, a woman of great patience and perseverance, made her do exercises and gradually she recovered the use of her legs, but it took more than three years of hard work before she was able to walk normally again. At that time, no-one could have guessed that Wilma the polio victim would one day turn into Wilma "the black gazelle". When she was fourteen, Wilma enrolled at the University of Tennessee. There she was coaxed away from basketball and into sprinting by a particularly farsighted coach named Ed Temple, and two years later was selected for the United States 4 x 100 meters women's relay team, which won the

bronze medal at the Melbourne Olympics.

Her moment of glory came in 1960 at the Rome Olympic Games, when she won both the 100 and 200 meters decisively, well in front of her nearest rivals. Her third gold medal was for the 4 x 100 meters relay in which she ran an astounding last lap, making up the precious seconds dropped by her teammates.

Marital troubles put a premature end to her career. Although she virtually abandoned competition sprinting when she was only 21, she has kept in touch with sport. At present she is responsible for running a museum of American athletics in Tennessee.

#### WILMA RUDOLPH

Born June 23, 1940, in Clarksville, Tenn.

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1956 OG: bronze medal in 4 x 100 m relay  
1960 OG: gold medal in 100 m, 200 m and 4 x 100 m relay

World records:

100 m in 11.3 sec (Sept. 2, 1960, in Rome)  
11.2 sec (July 19, 1961, in Stuttgart)  
200 m in 22.9 sec (July 9, 1960, in Corpus Christi, Tex.)  
4 x 100 m in 44.4 sec (Sept. 7, 1960, in Rome)  
44.3 sec (July 15, 1961, in Moscow)

*One of the last relay sprinters who "swallowed" her opponents*