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Wilma Rudolph

June 23, 1940 – November 12, 1994

Wilma Rudolph was an American Olympic sprinter from Clarksville, Tennessee. She became the first American woman – and first African American woman – to win three gold medals in track and field at a single Olympic Games in 1960. Held in Rome, Italy, the Games were a milestone for her. After tying a world record with an 11.3 second sprint in the 100 meter semifinals, she went on to win the event with a record-breaking 11.0 second dash in the final. She also broke the Olympic record in the 200-meter dash with a 23.2-second race in the heats before claiming her second gold medal. Finally, she was part of the U.S. team that established the world record in the 400-meter relay (44.4 seconds) before winning the gold with a time of 44.5 seconds.

Wilma's road to victory was not an easy one. She was born prematurely and later was stricken with double pneumonia, scarlet fever, and polio as a child. These illnesses caused problems with her left leg, forcing her to wear a brace. With great determination and physical therapy, she was able to overcome those disabilities.

After her athletic career, Wilma moved several times and lived in various places, including Indianapolis. In 1981, she established and led the Wilma Rudolph Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Indianapolis that trains young athletes. In 1987, she joined DePauw University in Greencastle as director of its women's track program and served as a consultant on minority affairs to the university's president. She was a sports commentator for ABC Sports during the 1984 Summer Olympics and lit the cauldron to open the Pan American Games in Indianapolis in 1987 at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

In July 1994, Wilma was diagnosed with brain cancer, after being diagnosed with throat cancer. Her condition worsened and she died November 12, 1994. She is an inspiration to young athletes; her legacy comes from her efforts to overcome obstacles that included childhood illnesses and a physical disability to become the fastest woman runner in the world in 1960.

For more information about the Wilma Rudolph, go to:
<https://www.biography.com/people/wilma-rudolph-9466552>

For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.