

## **There's Always Another Race**

Barcelona is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Its 15<sup>th</sup> century architecture and wide undulating streets all seem to funnel down to the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea. However, in the summer of 1992, I was not only captured by charms of this port city but I became captivated by the story of a beautiful woman. That summer I became enthralled by a woman I have never actually met and only glimpsed from a distance but her story has inspired me to this day.

In the summer of 1992, Barcelona played host to the world as the Olympic Games took center stage and I found myself seat dint he President's box for the finals of the women's 100-meter hurdle event in Olympic Stadium. The field for the event was stellar with the fastest and most athletic women in the world competing for the Olympic Gold but over in lane three was someone special,

This U.S. Olympian, just 4 years before, had been diagnosed with "Graves Disease", an affliction that attacks the thyroid and creates an over-active metabolism. She began to lose weight, lose her hair and lost her signature long fingernails. The disease robbed her of her strength and her ability to compete.

Now, after taking almost three years off from international competition, she found herself at the pinnacle of her sport, the finals of 100-meter hurdles in the Olympics. Most athletes would relish in the comeback, but not this beauty; she wanted to do something special. You see earlier in the week, she won the 100-meter dash, becoming the fastest woman in the world, yet no woman had ever won both the 100-meter race and the 100-meter hurdle event in the same Olympic Games. Yet she was poised to do just that.

As the gun went off to start the race, I sat there in utter amazement as she exploded out of her stance as if she herself were shot from the gun. I was mesmerized by how effortlessly she seemed to flow down the track and how gracefully she glided over each hurdle. One obstacle after another she seemed to measure with precision.

One hurdle, two, three, she was already in front; four hurdles, five, six, she had increased her distance and her lead. By the eighth hurdle, it was clear she was about to carve out her place in the record books, but then, without warning, without provocation, the impossible happened.

As this beautiful machine approached the ninth hurdle something unexplainable happened. The precision was off, no reason, just as a car inexplicably loses its timing, she just stumbled. The toe of her trail right foot caught the top of the ninth hurdle and she began tumbling down face first into the hard track. With less than 15 meters to go she crashed into the tenth hurdle and rolled onto her back as the first, then the second competitor passed her by. She still had a chance of winning the bronze, but as she stood and stumbled to the finish she was passed yet again. The Barcelona Beauty finished fourth.

I will never forget that warm summer evening in Barcelona. Gail Devers proved to me and the world that you never give up, you always finish the race because there is always another race tomorrow.

Gail Devers won the Olympic Gold medal in the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic Games.

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