

## Inspirational Athletes of the 2008 Beijing Olympics

The Olympic Games are not only a platform for competition and entertainment, but they can also serve to inspire people, even those of us who will never be Olympic athletes. During each installment of the Olympic Games, there are many inspirational stories and athletes that emerge, and though the Games haven't begun, the 2008 Beijing Olympics is already no exception to this trend. Let's discuss some of the inspirational athletes that will aspire to compete in this year's Olympic Games.

Recently, Oscar Pistorius of South Africa has become a huge story due to his battle to be included in the running for participation in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. You may have already heard of him, or even seen clips of him in action on television or elsewhere. If so, you'd know him immediately. Why? Because he was born without fibulas in either of his legs, and is a double-amputee as a result.

Pistorius had both of his legs amputated below the knee, and is only able to run because of custom made carbon fiber "blades" that are shaped much like a normal leg and foot are. The blades (nicknamed "Cheetah" blades by some) allow Pistorius to maintain balance and propel himself as an able-bodied runner does. Now, if Pistorius was merely able to compete after all he's been through, that would be inspirational enough. However, Pistorius doesn't just compete, he wins.

Pistorius, who is a former athlete in other sports, such as rugby, wrestling, and tennis, has dominated at Paralympic events, which is impressive in its own right, as he has set world records in the 100, 200, and 400 meter runs for Paralympic athletes. However, Pistorius didn't stop there. He has also experienced success while competing against able-bodied competitors, even winning events such as the 400 meters in his native South Africa.

Sadly, Pistorius was originally barred from competing against able-bodied athletes, but after an appeal and studies by scientists who insist that Pistorius' blades give him no unfair advantage, Pistorius has earned the right to try to participate in the 2008 Olympic Games. He has a bit of work to do, as his best time is one second off of the Olympic qualifying standard for the 400 meters, but Pistorius is used to overcoming odds.

Meanwhile, middle-aged people everywhere will be rooting for American swimmer Dara Torres. Torres competed in her first Olympics in 1984, believe it or not, and will be competing in her record fifth Olympic Games if she qualifies for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. At 41 years old (and after having a baby a few years

ago), Torres is somehow swimming better than ever.

Torres' success is the result of hard work, diligent training, and intelligence. Since she can't train as hard as her younger counterparts, she must train smarter than they do. She spends only about half as much time in the pool as she did earlier in her career, but has managed to swim faster times than she did then. She has lost weight since her last Olympic appearance, but has simultaneously increased her strength, through a dedicated and smart weight training program.

Unlike younger athletes, Dara Torres must take even more care of herself than the average Olympic athlete. Since her body doesn't recover as well as a twenty year old's after a difficult workout, Torres simply must make the most of her workouts, while spending more time recovering properly. Regular massages and other types of therapy help her to train at a high level, despite her age.

Clearly, if Torres is able to qualify, and better yet, win at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, it will be a victory for not just her, but 40-year olds everywhere! However, everyone can take something away from witnessing athletes like Torres and Pistorius, who refuse to let the limitations others put on them form their own realities. After all, if Torres can swim competitively at age 41, and Pistorius can run with the best of them as a double-amputee, think of the things you can accomplish!

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