AWESOME stories

Derek Redmond - The Day that Changed My Life



After snapping his hamstring during the 400m semi-final race in Barcelona's 1992 Summer Olympics, Derek Redmond is assisted by his father, Jim Redmond. With determination and courage, despite being in pain, Redmond crosses the finish line. Image online via the BBC.

> *Force is measured in kilograms.*
> *Speed is measured in seconds.*
> *Courage? You can't measure courage.*
>
> International Olympic Committee
> "Celebrate Humanity" Video

In 2012—the year that the Summer Olympics took place in London—Derek Redmond told a story about a day that changed his life.

A 400-metre record holder, in Britain, Redmond was at the peak of his athletic abilities on the day he took his starting-line position during the Barcelona semi-finals in 1992. His father was there to watch his Olympian son compete.

Everything seemed fine, during the run, until ... it wasn't. Along the back straight, Redmond's hamstring snapped. He fell to the ground in pain.



Derek—who has inspired millions of people ever since 1992—tells his story, in his own words:

When I took my place on the starting blocks I felt good.

For once I had no injuries, despite eight operations in four years, and I'd won the first two rounds without breaking sweat – including posting the fastest time in the first round heats. I was confident and when the gun went off I got off to a good start.

I got into my stride running round the first turn and I was feeling comfortable. Then I heard a popping sound. I kept on running for another two or three strides then I felt the pain. I thought I'd been shot, but then I recognized the agony.

I'd pulled my hamstring before and the pain is excruciating: like someone shoving a hot knife into the back of your knee and twisting it. I grabbed the back of my leg, uttered a few expletives and hit the deck.

I couldn't believe this was happening after all the training I'd put in. I looked around to see where the rest of the field were, and they had only 100m to go. I remember thinking if I got up I could still catch them and qualify.

The pain was intense. I hobbled about 50m until I was at the 200m mark. Then I realized it was all over. I looked round and saw that everyone else had crossed the finishing line. But I don't like to give up at anything – not even an argument, as my wife will tell you – and I decided I was going to finish that race if it was the last race I ever did.

All these doctors and officials were coming onto the track, trying to get me to stop but I was having none of it. Then, with about 100m to go, I became aware of someone else on the track. I didn't realize it was my dad, Jim, at first. He said, "Derek, it's me, you don't need to do this."

I just said, "Dad, I want to finish, get me back in the semi-final." He said, "OK. We started this thing together and now we'll finish it together."

He managed to get me to stop trying to run and just walk and he kept repeating, "You're a champion, you've got nothing to prove."

Today I don't feel anger, just frustration. The footage has since been used in adverts by Visa, Nike and the International Olympic Committee – I don't go out of my way to watch it, but it isn't painful any more

We hobbled over the finishing line with our arms round each other, just me and my dad, the man I'm really close to, who's supported my athletics career since I was seven years old. I've since been told there was a standing ovation by the 65,000 crowd, but nothing registered at the time. I was in tears and went off to the medical room to be looked at, then I took the bus back to the Olympic village.

My dream was over. In Seoul, four years earlier, I didn't even get to the start line because of an Achilles injury and had "DNS" – Did Not Start – next to my name. I didn't want them to write "DNF" – Did Not Finish – in Barcelona.

When I saw my doctor, he told me I'd never represent my country again. I felt like there'd been a death. I never raced again and I was angry for two years.

Then one day I just thought: There are worse things than pulling a muscle in a race, and I just decided to get on with my life.

Today I don't feel anger, just frustration. The footage has since been used in adverts by Visa, Nike and the International Olympic Committee – I don't go out of my way to watch it, but it isn't painful any more and I have the Visa ad on my iPad.

If I hadn't pulled a hamstring that day I could have been an Olympic medallist, but I love the life I have now. I might not have been a motivational speaker or competed for my country at basketball, as I went on to do. And my dad wouldn't have been asked to carry the Olympic torch this year, which was a huge honor for him.

After his fall, Derek stood up. Determined to finish the race, he could only hop toward the finish line.

Everyone who was watching could see pain etched on his face. Still he did not give up.

Jim Redmond was also watching from the stands. Trying to join his son, on the track, Jim pushed-away an Olympic official who tried to stop him. He had something important to do and would not be deterred by anyone or anything.

Someone else crossed the finish-line first, in that semi-final race, but few people remember the moment when Steve Lewis (an American) did that. Everyone was watching Derek Redmond who was showing the world what it means to be an Olympic athlete.

Not only did Derek Redmond understand the meaning of "perseverance" in 1992, he understood it four years before (in Seoul) and years before that (as he honed his skills and competed in his chosen sport). That perseverance helped him to find the courage he needed to finish the 400m race.

After his Barcelona injury, when he learned he could no-longer compete in the the 400m—or any other distance runs—Derek did not give-up his athletic life. Instead, he switched sports, playing professional basketball for the Birmingham Bullets.

After his competitive days as an athlete were over for good, and Derek chose to be a motivational speaker, he had the credentials to forge another career. It was his very-public and pain-filled time in Barcelona—where his personal determination and his father's love got him to the finish line—that people respected.



Sometimes life takes us down pathways we never anticipated and do not want. We have significant choices to face when those events occur. We can persevere, like Derek Redmond, or we can give-up our dreams. We can succeed, in other ways, or we can succumb to self-pity.

We have other choices to make, as well, involving our friends and loved ones. We can accept their help—as Derek did, from his father—or we can turn-away those offers of love and assistance.

We may have no control over unplanned and unwanted events, like a snapped hamstring, but we have absolute control over our own responses. Sometimes bad events actually lead to days which can change our lives—for the better—just like the day that changed Derek Redmond's life.

Credits:

Image of Derek Remond, at the Barcelona 1992 Summer Olympics, online via the Olympic Committee. Fair use

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Media Stream



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