

Mayers: Overcoming adversity to race

Jamaica track star puts injury, death in family behind him to run at US Youth Games

By ROBERT PINCUS

Jamicha Mayers has experienced more adversity in his 12 years than most people will in a lifetime.

Mayers' troubles started four years ago when he was in a car crash in Orlando, Fla. After the accident, doctors told Mayers he would never walk again, much less run.

"He just started running a year ago," said Derek Taylor, who is an assistant coach with the New York City track team at the United States Youth Games and coaches at Campus Magnet and the Metro Eagles. "The family was going to Disney World in a mini-van and the driver lost control and they got hit. He was in therapy for a long time."

Earlier this summer, Mayers won the 800-meter race at the USA Nationals for his age group. Ironically, the race was held in Orlando.

"His mom eventually got him into track because the doctors said he would never walk again," said Taylor, a close friend of the family. "The doctors in Florida saw his name in the papers and called the mother and asked if that was her son."

His troubles did not end there. Last week his step-father was killed in a motorcycle accident when he tried to get on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and was hit by a truck.

The funeral was this past Wednesday. Mayers decided to run in the 400-meter race at the U.S. Youth Games on Saturday.

"We weren't even sure he was going to make it, understandably," New York City coach Errol Anderson said.

Mayers said he was originally not going to run in the event.

"I got over it and I decided I would run," said Mayers, a Jamaica resident who attends IS 238.

"His mom wanted him to run to get him out of the house and his mind off of [his step-father]," Taylor said.

Anderson said this could be therapy for Mayers.

"[It can be good] not to labor the situation of the passing of a family member and to get your mind off it for a day or

two," said Anderson, who coaches the Metro Eagles at Roy Wilkins Park in St. Albans. "[It is a positive to] go back to something you love to do and in this case it's track and field. Sometimes we as adults are not able to do this ourselves, where here it is a youngster of his age coming out and doing this. I commend him quite a bit."

Anderson knows how hard it is to overcome the death of a parent. His mother passed away two weeks ago in Florida.

"I know the feeling," Anderson said. "It was hard for me to deal with and I didn't know if I would be here myself."

Taylor said track athletes usually bounce back from tragedies well.

"It's an individual sport where you don't need a team and you have to get out there and do it on your own," Taylor said. "They have this inner spirit that just gets them to rise to the occasion."

Once again Mayers suffered a setback when he had an asthma attack during the race and collapsed at the finish line, gasping for breathe.

"The first 250 meters of the race Jamicha was in the race and doing well," Anderson said. "He has a respiratory problem with asthma and that kicked in with the high humidity and the heat. He was barely able to finish the race."

Despite having trouble breathing from the 250 meter mark, Mayers was able to finish in fourth place with a time of 57.7 seconds.

"When I came around the corner and I breathed into my mouth my heart just started sinking in and I couldn't breathe after that," Mayers said. "I felt like I wanted to stop and faint, but I just kept on running my hardest."

The miracle of Mayers just might not stop until an Olympic event down the road.

"This kid was in an accident and they felt he was not going to be able to walk," Taylor said. "Now he's not only walking, he's running."

"It's a miracle," he said. "It's a blessing from God."



JAMICHA MAYERS