

Amid Olympic Controversy, One Athlete Is Setting Records and Giving God Glory

As talks about COVID-19 measures and controversy around the first transgender athlete to compete swirl around the upcoming Olympic Games, one track star has a far different focus: being the best athlete she can, all for the glory of God.

Sydney McLaughlin, a New Jersey native, is the new world record-holder for the women's 400-meter hurdles. She clocked a time of seconds at the June 27 U.S. Olympic Trials. But the 21-year-old says this amazing feat was only possible by one thing: God's race plan.

UNBELIEVABLE @GoSydGo. #TrackFieldTrials21

– Team USA (@TeamUSA) June 28, 2021

Following the meet, McLaughlin posted on Instagram how getting to that race was evidence of the testimony of God's grace and guidance in her life. "Weeks like these are some of the hardest in a track athletes life," she wrote, referring to the time of preparation she endured leading up to a meet she called "something special."

"The mental strain of preparing for the rounds in order to solidify your spot is heavy enough," she continued. "But the amount of weight the Lord took off my shoulders, is the reason I could run so freely yesterday."

Through the trials she endured before taking her mark—bad practices, three false start delays and an overall meet delay—McLaughlin heard God's still, small whisper: "Just focus on Me."

"It was the best race plan I could have ever assembled," the athlete says.

But she doesn't seek personal acclaim. Instead, McLaughlin runs to "reflect His perfect will that is already set in stone."

"I don't deserve anything," she says. "But by grace through faith, Jesus has given me everything. Records come and go. The glory of God is eternal."

This declaration of faith is refreshing, some supporters say, especially in light of the developing story about Gwen Berry, who drew negative attention when she turned away from the American flag during the singing of the national anthem. Berry took offense to the lines of "The Star-Spangled Banner" which, she says, allude to catching and beating slaves.

Berry said, "If you know your history, you know the full song of the national anthem, the third paragraph speaks to slaves in America, our blood being slain ... all over the floor. It's disrespectful, and it does not speak for Black Americans. It's obvious. There's no question."

While critics claim Berry shouldn't be representing the U.S. in the Olympics, supporters have come out in droves to show their appreciation for McLaughlin.

Sydney McLaughlin didn't just win the #TrackFieldTrials21 400m hurdles.

She didn't just qualify for the #TokyoOlympics.

She set a WORLD RECORD doing it.

– NBC Sports (@NBCSports) June 28, 2021

As the youngest U.S. Olympian to compete in track and field since 1972, McLaughlin beat out former world record holder

Dalilah Muhammad in the 400-meter race.

One Twitter user commented on one of McLaughlin's faith-filled April tweet, "You are amazing! Strong faith and 'trust the process!' Kudos on your world record!!!"

You are amazing! Strong faith and "trust the process!" Kudos on your world record!!! @intercessor714

– Stephen Shenk (@intercessor714) June 28, 2021

While McLaughlin's parents supported her from the stands at what would be a momentous meet, members of her alma mater cheered her on as they watched from afar.

"A lot of people know that when she walks in a room, all eyes are on her. She's a very humble person, so just to see her so successful is pretty cool, it's awesome," said Marcus Sancho, a coach for Union Catholic High School's track and field team.

McLaughlin's social media pages overflow with faith-filled messages, like this one, where she quoted Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand," along with a message on the nearness of God when loneliness sets in. {eoa}

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