

Nigerian Olympian Runner Pursues Jesus Over Gold

A doping scandal cost the US 4×400 meter men's relay team their 2000 **Olympic gold** medal. Days before the Games began, the International Olympic Committee stripped Team USA of its award and gave it to the Nigerian team 12 years after the event was run.

That's on the minds of this year's Nigerian athletes as they chase gold. In an earlier briefing, Ambassador Olwatoyin Lawal, Deputy Nigerian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, urged the team to remember they bear their country's honor.

"Representing Nigeria comes with a lot of responsibility," Lawal says. "As flag bearers, you owe Nigeria a duty to be scandal-free."

Integrity plays a big role for the athletes who are not only chasing gold but also are **bearing the name of Christ**. Athletes like Idara Otu. She's a Nigerian-American track and field athlete running under the green and white.

A graduate of Stanford University and two-time All-American, she rejoined the "red oval" community chasing a spot on the Nigerian 2012 Olympic Team. Now, she's training for the semi-finals for the women's 4×400 m relay on Aug. 10.

There's been little buzz about the Nigeria's Olympic women track and field team members, although the chief coach of Team Nigeria expressed hope that Nigeria's daughters would medal. The last time that happened was in 1996, where the team won silver.

The pressure to perform can get overwhelming. Eking out extra hundredths of a second can create temptations as athletes look

for advantages over themselves and each other. However, for Otu and other athletes at the Olympics, they share one thing in common: many of them are devout Christians.

These athletes have gone on record sharing that their desire in competing is more about honoring God than striving for an Olympic medal. Aside from the spectacle of the games, Otu says her first priority is to keep her mind focused on her training.

“Being that this is my first **Olympic Games**, I don’t want to say that I don’t have any expectations,” she says. “Of course, our expectation is to be on the medal stand as a relay team, but really it’s to just compete well to bring pride to Nigeria as a country.”

Throughout history, the lives of Olympic competitors have served to inspire and challenge others on a personal level. Otu’s **bold faith** and practical living helps her stay on a mission to become a better **follower of Christ**.

“Really, it’s staying focused and believing in what the goal is and what the outcome is and regrouping,” Otu says. “Not everything is going to be easy; and just being a Christian or having faith does not mean everything is going to be easy. It just helps to give you the strength to overcome whatever obstacles that are in your way.”

Otu’s thoughts are also applicable to her sport. Focus is central to good, consistent races. Otu maintains her focus with her favorite Scripture passage, Psalm 37:4: “‘Delight yourself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of your heart.’ That’s really what I live by. Obviously, I’m not perfect, but I’m trying to be more Christ-like every day; but I always think that if I’m delighting in Him, He’s going to give me what’s in my heart.”

In the meantime, on the road to the semi-finals, Otu strives for more than gold.