

# SPORTS BOARD

SPORTS, GAMING, HORSERACING

September 29, 1988

## SPORTLIGHT

By R.L. Greene

NEW YORK—Thirty-eight years have passed since Wilma Rudolph literally sped to fame. It was the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome when she became the first American woman to capture three gold medals in a single Games. It seems as if it was only yesterday.

The beautiful, willowy runner captured the hearts of the world as she blazed her way to glory, winning the 100 meters in a record 11 seconds flat, the 200 meters in 24 seconds flat, then anchoring the 400-meter relay to victory in 44.5 seconds. It was a time of rejoicing.

Here was a Black woman who has overcome several handicaps. The 20th of 22 children, the daughter of a struggling handyman who at the age of four was stricken with scarlet fever and double pneumonia, Wilma was apparently doomed to be a cripple for life.

"For a long time I didn't see any improvement. My leg was crooked and I had to

wear a brace," she later wrote in her autobiography.

It was her family, especially her mother that kept her going toward a dream. It wasn't a dream of winning Olympic gold medals. It was a dream of just walking again.

"When I was not even able to go to school for two years and no one would play with me because of my braces, my brothers and sisters were always there to help me run," she says. "My mother was there to let me know my dream was realistic when no doctor would tell me if I'd walk without braces. They suffered with me and for me."

But walk she did. And run like the wind.

While everyone remembers Wilma at Rome, the 1960 Olympics actually were her second Games. In 1956, at the age of 15 and weighing only 89 pounds, she competed in the Melbourne, Australia Olympics.

She met disappointment again. This time, however, it was a different type of dis-

appointment.

She was confident she would win a gold medal. Instead, running the third leg, Wilma teamed with Mae Faggs, Margaret Matthews and Isabelle Daniels to finish third in the 400-meter relay, capturing the bronze medal.

"I was determined that four years from then I was going to win a gold medal or two for the United States," she remembers.

Returning from Melbourne, Wilma finished high school and enrolled at Tennessee State. Then, in 1960, she returned to the Olympic Games and made history.

Her father was critically ill at the time. She recalls how before leaving for Rome she went home to Clarksville, Tenn., where her father promised to live until she returned with her medals.

Besides her 100-meter record, she set an Olympic record in the 200 meters of 44.4 seconds in a preliminary heat; she became the first American woman to win the 100 meters since the 1936 Games in Berlin and the first-ever American woman to win the gold medal in the 200 meters.

The relay team of Martha Hudson, Lucinda Williams, Barbara Jones and Wilma — all from Tennessee State — set an Olympic record of 44.4 seconds in their event during the preliminaries.

For most, that would be the end of a beautiful story. For Wilma Rudolph, it was

just the beginning.

She bore four children, has taught high school, modeled, worked as a Hollywood publicist, served as an analyst on the faculty of a university, lectured, campaigned as a fund-raiser and done television commentary. She is active in the Women's Sports Foundation, lobbied for Title IX, the law requiring equal treatment for women in college sports, and became the driving force behind the establishment of the \$1.5 million Track and Field Hall of Fame in Charleston, S.C.

She now is director of track at DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. And she created the Wilma Rudolph Foundation eight years ago, combining academics and athletics in a summer program for children.

Now she is touring the U.S. boosting a program created by Seagram's. More than 550 family members of the 1988 U.S. Olympic team squad will be flown to Seoul, housed, fed and given \$1,000 in spending money. The program is accepting donations, but Seagram's will underwrite the entire expense, which adds up to several million dollars.

"They were my motivation, and they shared everything that happened in Rome," Wilma says of her family, which couldn't see her Olympic triumphs in person. "My every thought was about them, and I worried for them."

### WOMEN'S AEROBIC CLASS ORGANIZED AT DOOLITTLE

A Women's Aerobics Class is being organized by the City of Las Vegas Doolittle Community Center, 1901 North "J" Street. Beginning Oct. 10, the class designed for those 15 and over will be offered free to the public. The class will continue each Monday thereafter with two sessions noon and 6:00 p.m. For more information call the Doolittle Center at 386-6374.

## Register

"Now, maybe you understand why Seagram's program is so important. The presence of the family members will provide a lot of support for the entire team. And every athlete will know that someone is there watching and cheering for him alone, win or lose."

Earlier this month Wilma returned to Nashville where the indoor track at Tennessee State University was named in her honor. Her family joined her during the ceremony.

"If you can have part of your dreams come true, it's a wonderful feeling," she said. "The good overshadowed the bad."

### FREE TO THE PUBLIC Skin Cancer Screening

Thurs., Oct. 13th, 12:30 PM  
Thurs., Oct. 27th, 12:30 PM  
Thurs., Nov. 10th, 12:30 PM  
Thurs., Dec. 8th, 12:30 PM

### SUPPORT & COUNSELING GROUP

Monday nights 5:30-7:00 PM  
For cancer patients and/or their families

Location: Ross & Coletta Miller Cancer Education Center

1325 E. Harmon (across from UNLV)

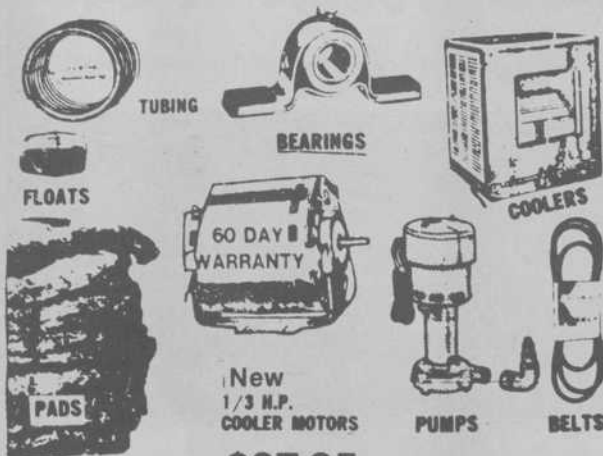
For registration & info: Call 798-6877

### FATHER & SON NIGHT AT DOOLITTLE CENTER

As part of their new Fall '88 program, the City of Las Vegas Doolittle Community Center, 1901 North "J" Street, will be hosting a weekly Father & Son Night. Beginning Oct. 5, the free program will run on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. Activities will include basketball, football, bowling, miniature golf, and table games. Call the Doolittle center at 386-6374 for more information.

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