

Jarryd Wallace Talks the Power of an Achievable Goal

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Team Toyota athlete Jarryd Wallace, a two-time Paralympic Track & Field athlete from Athens, Georgia, has learned many lessons while training and competing at the elite level. But the thing that’s resonated with him the most during his career? A lesson his father taught him about setting goals.

“Growing up, my dad always said that a good goal was 60% achievable. Anything higher than 60% needs to go on the to-do list. Anything lower, you should figure out the next steps that can get you closer to that goal,” says Wallace.

Since then, Wallace has been ticking goals off his to-do list one by one. And he’s made a lot of progress — competing in two Paralympic Games, setting four world records and being a three-time World Championship gold medalist.

Wallace has risen to every challenge he's faced, both on and off the track, and done so while praising the support of those who have helped lift him up. As the turn of phrase goes, he's shown that it takes a village to raise a world record-setting, gold medal-winning, Paralympian-competing champion. But it first started with family.



An Athletic Pedigree

The son of a collegiate tennis coach and a former all-conference distance runner at the University of Georgia, Wallace spent his early days being loaded into a baby jogger for marathon training. At three years old, he was playing tennis. By five, the family was going on camping trips and taking laps around the lake on water skis. “It wasn’t until I was in elementary school, maybe third or fourth grade, when I realized that not every family went for a 5k run every Saturday morning at 7,” he says.

His competitive streak continued throughout high school as Wallace became a state champion runner in the 800-meter and 1,600-meter. But at 18 years old, Wallace was diagnosed with Compartment Syndrome, a very serious and painful condition that occurs when a large amount of pressure builds up in a muscle compartment. In what would have been Wallace’s first year as a Division 1 college athlete, he was faced with a life-altering decision.

“I remember being in a doctor’s office and he pretty much looked at me and said, ‘It’s not a matter of *if*, but *when* you lose your leg,’” says Wallace. “He told me I had an 80-year-old leg on a 20-year-old body.”

Wallace left that appointment knowing that he’d have to have his leg amputated. But just two hours after his hospital visit, when he got back to his hotel room, he came across the Paralympic gold medal list. He called his parents into the room, pointed to the screen and said, “I can do this. My name’s going to be on that list.”

Going for Goals

Wallace admits that when he set his sights on gold, he was still unsure how he’d actually accomplish it. “I was brushing up against that 50-60% range,” he says with a laugh.

But just 12 weeks after his amputation, Wallace found himself in Buford, Georgia, getting ready to try out his first running blade. He attributes his fast recovery to his surgeon, the prosthetics company and the therapist who, as a whole, came together to help get him back in the race. However, no one could have predicted it when Wallace stood up on the blade and began sprinting up and down the street. He came back to mouths agape; his recovery team had never seen someone adjust so quickly.

“For me, running has always been second nature, so I just hit the ground running — no pun intended,” says Wallace. “Nothing has stopped me since then.”

Sixteen months after his amputation, Wallace competed in the 2011 Parapan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico. Not only did he win his first major international gold medal, but he also set his first world-record time.



Racing for a Reason

When Wallace first spoke with his doctor about his leg, the doctor asked him what he wanted to do with his life. Wallace said he wanted to be pain free, to run and to ultimately raise a family. Today, he's one of the greatest Paralympic runners of all time. He attributes a lot of his success to the support he's received along the way — and it all started with a goal that was 60% achievable.

“I can't ever emphasize enough the value and importance of the team behind me,” he says. “From my family to my coaches, managers and sponsors — they've all played an influential part in allowing me to do what I've been put on this earth to do, which is to run fast.”

And no matter where in the world that team will be watching him run, Wallace knows his family always has his back. That's why, as he gears up for the Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, Wallace is competing for more than a gold medal.

“I'm running for something that's bigger than me,” says Wallace. “I just hope to be a great example for people; to motivate, encourage and inspire them to push beyond.”