

The Petite Compete

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The announcer's voice cut through the roar of the crowd. "The runners are rounding the corner . . . 100 meters left! Yoshiaki Kato is leading the pack! Now Pablo Escobar is advancing. He's pulled ahead of superstar Kato! Escobar wins the marathon!"

It was day one of the 2024 Ultra-Junior Olympics, and my adrenalin was rushing. I had never attended such an event, as it was my first year as a sports medicine physician. I proceeded to the medical tent to wait for the runners. Soon the medics delivered one who had fainted. His blood pressure was 80/40, about average for a four-year-old. After an IV for dehydration, he began to regain consciousness, muttering, "I want my mommy!"

An agitated woman burst into the tent. "Will he be okay?"

"He'll be fine," I assured her, as little Yoshiaki bawled and clenched his mother's neck. "He was just dehydrated."

"It's okay lambchop, you'll win next time," Mrs. Kato cooed. "After all, you're only four. You'll still be eligible for the 2028 Olympics."

Next, I stitched Inga Eisenfrau's lacerated elbow and ran a blood test for tetanus. Standard procedure dictated that I direct the mecho-mini-medic to run an immediate DNA scan. I was surprised when the results indicated the presence of canine DNA. When I questioned her father, he looked at me as if I were a moron. "When she was still a Petri dish embryo, doctors used a retro virus to ferry Husky genes into her DNA. How else do you expect a three-year-old to run a marathon so quickly?"

I sighed and proceeded to the high jump pit. While bandaging a cut on Xiu Lu's leg, I was amazed at the unusual amount of hair covering her body. "Looking at her hairy legs?" Xiu's mom asked. "That's from her kangaroo implants. They help her jump, but now her hair grows at an abnormal rate, despite the steroids she's taking."

I knew parents commonly arranged for animal transplants and steroid injections to help their children's performances in the Ultra-Junior Olympics, but I hadn't realized how far things had come. I remember my parents talking about adult Olympians and high school athletes taking steroids when I was in fourth grade, back in 2008. By 2012, middle school athletes took them. In 2020, my first year in medical school, kindergarteners commonly received animal transplants and took steroids. Med school professors had briefed us about



these petite athletes. However, today in 2024, I was appalled that toddlers would be subject to such drastic measures.

That evening, as I ambled through my hotel lobby, I heard two women quarreling over who would win the mile run, Amy Scamper or Jyl Fleeting. A clerk informed me the women were teachers at rival preschools: Leonard Bias Athletic Institute and Ben Johnson Toddler Sports Academy. I had heard about Amy and Jyl, the two best milers, rumored to run as fast as a laser blast. From what I'd witnessed other toddlers do, I almost believed it.

On the fifth day of competition, I met Amy and Jyl. While I was taking a well-earned break at the hotel, two petite lasses sprinted exuberantly past me down the corridor. I was stunned at how fast they were going. "Hey girls! Come here!" Although they were many doors down the hall, they stood before me within seconds.

"Are you Jyl and Amy?" I asked. One girl nodded through her giggles. "I thought you were rivals."

"Well," said the blonde, "we're supposed to be. Mommy, Daddy and Coach never let us near each other, even though we're bestest friends!" She beamed at her pal, then whispered conspiratorially, "But if we're training, they'll let us go anywhere without checking."

At that moment, a woman opened a door down the hall and shrieked, "Amy! Get away from that monstrous child!" She marched over and glowered at me, then pulled the little brunette down the hall and shooed her into their suite. Jyl smirked, then darted off down the hallway.

I didn't see Amy again until her pre-race checkup. As I examined her daughter, Amy's mother sniffed haughtily. "You're that rookie medic I caught with my beloved Amy and that wretched Jyl."

I knew Jyl and Amy's parents weren't exactly friends, but I didn't appreciate her malicious comments. "I'm an intern Ma'am, not a medic. And in case you hadn't noticed, Amy and Jyl appear to be buddies."

She hissed, her eyes narrowing. "HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT!!! Don't come near my daughter ever again, or I'll feed you to my dogs!" She stormed away, her whimpering daughter in tow.

How could people do this to their kids? When I raised my concerns at breakfast, my colleagues just chortled. *They know all about this and they think it's funny*, I thought. In my opinion, there was nothing humorous about injecting animal DNA into test-tube babies, or transplanting animal muscles into toddlers. Taking anti-rejection drugs shouldn't be a normal part of a kid's life. Parents didn't need to complicate things by injecting hormones of other creatures.

I decided to learn how the kids felt about it all. After breakfast, I found Jyl and Amy stretching at the track. "Hello girls," I said in the most pleasant voice I could muster.

"Hello," said Amy.

"I guess you girls like to race, huh?"

"Well, sorta," muttered Jyl.

"What do you mean?" I prompted. My offer of a few forbidden tootsie rolls coaxed them into opening up.

"Well . . . our mommies and daddies want us to," mumbled Amy, her mouth jammed with gooey candy, "but I hate running. I wouldn't even be fast without operations or shots Mommy gives me every night." She suddenly erupted into tears. I tried to hug her, but she

shoved me away. "Don't you dare tell Mommy I said that, or she'll spank me!" Before I could respond, two trainers hurried over to retrieve their stars. One looked at me sternly, but didn't say anything.

I knew from media coverage that Jyl and Amy ran at approximately the same speed due to implants they received when babies. Jyl had retina transplants from some poor (now blind) falcon, so she could see the exact millisecond the starting laser went off. She also had the DNA of a pronghorn antelope. Amy had cheetah DNA, and could sprint at seventy miles per hour! I suspected they also took the new, undetectable steroids we learned about in medical school.

Seven toddlers would be running the mile, but Amy and Jyl were the central attraction. I proceeded to the starting line. After some final preparations, the racers got into position. Millions of spectators, watching in person or on-line, avidly anticipated the competition.

A bright laser flashed and the runners were off! It took only seconds for Jyl and Amy to dash into the lead. Neck and neck, each girl tried to pull ahead of the other. Although only three minutes, I felt a lifetime pass before they approached the finish line. With one final burst of speed, Amy wrenched ahead and won. However, her victory smile suddenly transformed into a bewildered grimace. She frantically clenched her throat which frothed bloody bubbles, staggered, then keeled over. I rushed to her side, but too late; she was dead.

After a moment of shocked silence, Jyl howled an anguished "NO-O-O!" She crumpled in a heap on Amy's body, shaking with sobs. Crying hysterically, Amy's mother sprinted over and wrenched Jyl away. "You devil child!" she shrieked. "You killed my baby!" Within two chaotic minutes, medics took Amy's body away on a stretcher.

The audience was abuzz, astounded by Amy's abrupt death. Because she had been in peak physical shape, I suspected it must have been Amy's muscle and DNA implants, steroids, and sheer physical strain that had extracted the ultimate price from the toddler.

A day later, the networks scheduled a prime time tribute to America's newest heroine. Never one to miss a media opportunity, the President of the United States elbowed her way onto the program. She offered a tearful, but empty eulogy about Amy's valor, and announced that a plaque would be presented to her preschool at a memorial service.

I accompanied a weepy Jyl to the scheduled presentation in Amy's hometown. I had seen a photograph of the plaque: a wood base that held a gold circle engraved with Amy's name. She had indeed been a phenomenal runner. As we made our way into the colossal auditorium for the service, Jyl gasped. Looking around the huge hall, I couldn't help but duplicate her exclamation. I shuddered involuntarily. The entire room glowed gold with innumerable plaques honoring dead toddlers.

