

Yvette Williams

Yvette Williams stood tall at the start of the long jump track. Her last two jumps had been fouled, and this was her last chance to make a record-breaking jump like her supporters expected. Somehow, she felt no fear, she stood bravely, the pressure of the olympic games couldn't even brush her. Yvette ran, her feet thumping down the track...

Yvette had always been a trailblazer for women, when she was just a teen she held dreams of having a sporting career. But not everyone thought of this as a wonderful, inspiring, choice; those days, people thought that if she became an athlete she would "gain unsightly muscles". At the time, her friends were getting married and having children, devoting themselves to being housewives. She was expected to do the same. But Yvette Williams did not give up on her dreams that easily, she wrote in her sporting diary in 1951, "One year today is the opening of the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki, so I just wonder if I'll be there. Either that or doing housework, I suppose."

All she could think about was the stretch of sand quickly looming towards her, she flew towards the board leaping into the air...

Yvette couldn't just dream about it though, she needed it to come true, she achieved this with hours of hard work. In the morning she used old concrete blocks as makeshift weights, and she had a gym set up in her uncle's spare room, so she could spend hours doing callisthenics before she went to work. Can you imagine doing that every day? She persevered to achieve what she wanted most, and that inspires me. Realising she needed expert advice to improve, the pioneering athlete turned to athletics coach, Jim Bellwood. With him she perfected her hurdling, shot put, and discus.

Yvette could hear the wind whistling in her ear, but the crowd, cheering enthusiastically, sounded muted as though underwater. She could even smell the sweat of the many hard-working athletes. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion...

Yvette was unsure if she would be selected for the 1952 Helsinki Olympic games. It was said that: 'Only New Zealand's best athletes and, even then, only those with a winning chance would be sent to the Helsinki Olympics.' While most people would be panicked, maybe terrified by the fact their whole career, hopes and dreams, relied on the slight possibility of being chosen, Yvette took it in her stride, it was as though she wasn't worried. But, privately, she still knew she might not be chosen. She knew that few New Zealand athletes had been selected for the 1948 Olympic team and they were all male. Amazingly, she stayed calm. I envy the way she effortlessly took on the challenges, not panicking, but still aware of the risks. I think it is a good way to be.

Yvette sailed through the long jump with her arms held high, her hair streaming out behind her, and a big smile on her face. Her dreams were coming true...

Still before the games Yvette fantasised about, she hired a professional photographer to capture some images of her training routine. She decided on the local photographer, Mr Edward Arthur Phillips, and spent several weeks having her photos taken. One Sunday morning with clear skies and dewy grass, Phillips and Yvette went to the beach, near the St Clair headland, and readied themselves for the incredible photo opportunity. Phillips, with his hands in the pockets of his enormous wool coat, stood with his camera at the base of a sand dune, while Yvette with a short-sleeved top on waited at the top for Phillips' signal. When she jumped it was magnificent. Leaping towards the sunrise, and the tide lapping at the beach, with her arms gently outstretched, her right leg pointing out, and her left leg neatly tucked under her. It was pure happiness, she was doing what she loved. I hope I get that in my future too.

Yvette felt the sand between her toes as she soared down to the ground, she landed gracefully and the noise of the crowd came crashing back like an avalanche. They were cheering for her, just her.

I think Yvette definitely deserved the cheering, the medal, everything. She worked so hard and it all paid off, she made it to the olympic games! That is why I admire her, she never gave up, she chose what she wanted to do and didn't stop until she got it. whatever barriers that stood in her way, she broke them down. Not many people can do that. At the olympic games she had landed her jump, a women's olympic record breaking jump!

Yvette looked up at the stand of judges, a red flag was slowly being raised... Yvette stared up at it, panicking. Her breath caught in her throat... then they lifted the white flag to the sky, and Yvette Williams had succeeded! That nice feeling flowed through her, all her hard work had paid off, she had done what she had always dreamed of doing!

When Yvette returned home from the Olympic Games, after having won the gold medal for long jump, she was celebrated by excited New Zealander fans, as our country's "Golden Girl". She must have felt amazing, coming home having achieved something so big, something they believed she could do. Well not *all* of them had believed. It would also feel good to succeed, despite some people disapproving her choices, they surely weren't expecting her to return home as a hero. It gives me a wonderful feeling, just even thinking about the happiness of that moment when she arrived home, after doing something incredible. Yvette didn't stop there though, she kept at her athletics and sports, winning a few medals at the commonwealth games. Even when she finished her sporting life, she kept going.

Once her career as an athlete was over, Yvette dedicated herself to helping others. She coached people for gymnastics and basketball, and also became a health and P.E teacher at a secondary school. She positively impacted so many girls lives', inspiring them to become athletes. She was a trailblazer who not only achieved new things for women and sports herself, but also helped the new generation succeed as well.

I like to think Yvette would be proud of how far women athletes have come. It is no longer frowned upon for girls to follow their dreams of sports. I play football, and I

realise that part of the reason I have this opportunity is because of Yvette, paving the way for us. Yvette started off as an unimportant new zealand girl, but made her way to fame through hard work. She became a crucial part of sports for New zealand, maybe even the whole world. Yvette is a great example of how you can achieve your dreams, even if other people don't think you can, even if it seems too hard.

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