

All Winners

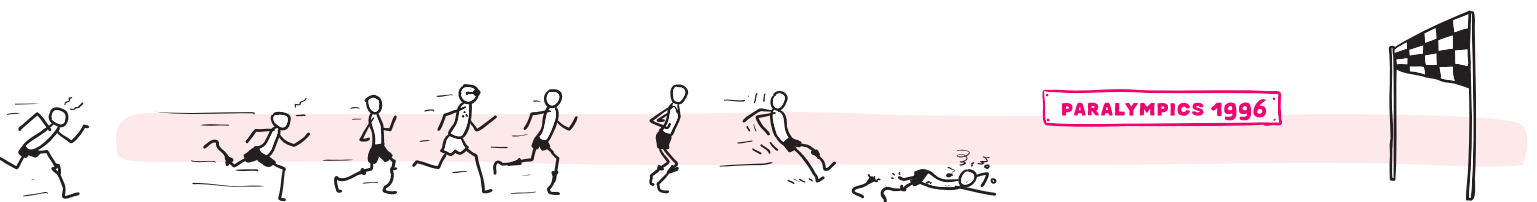
In 1996, Atlanta hosted the Paralympics, the Olympic Games for people with disabilities. The games were supposed to take place in the same venues as the recently concluded Olympics, but some of them had to be held in the “ruins” of those events, since the commercial operators had already begun dismantling the facilities. Despite this, the enthusiastic crowds witnessed gripping contests, perhaps none more unforgettable than the men’s 400-meter final.

Eight men lined up in the arena. It wasn’t a pretty sight in the traditional sense; it lacked the typical elegance of a standard 400-meter race. Some people even looked away. But those who kept watching were captivated by the sheer will and mental toughness shown by eight men with different physical disabilities competing in a single race.

Then, it happened: One of the men who was leading the field just before the finish line took a massive tumble. The runner who was now sure to overtake him for a guaranteed win made a wild, split-second decision to give up the gold medal. Instead, he turned to his fallen opponent and laboriously helped him to his feet. Together, they limped towards the finish line, but by then, they didn’t stand a chance. The rest of the pack was already closing in. But what did the six other runners do? The first broke off his run, went over to the two, and put his arm around his competitor’s shoulder. The second did the same, then the third, the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth. Laughing and crying, the eight competitors formed a cluster on the track. They limped, ran, and dragged themselves across the finish line together: There were eight winners.

The story of the 400-meter final in Atlanta shows that you can lose a lot for the sake of others without giving up on yourself. “So the last will be first, and the first last,” says Jesus (Mt 20:16). A runner who turns down the gold to help another is a hero. A runner who wins gold because another has fallen merely gets a piece of metal around his neck.

Bernhard Langenstein, *Desiderata* (Tredition, 2017), 44–45.



REFLECT

Read this story out loud. How can your love story become a success story for you and your future children?