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Editorial

Roars of cheers, blocks of supporters, and showers of medals

Track and field competitions at Special Olympics inspire both athletes and fans from all over the world

The atmosphere in the Hanns-Braun-Stadion in the Olympic park in Berlin is electric. In the warm-up area, the track and field delegation from Chile is singing their traditional song. “We always sing it before every competition. It motivates the athletes and puts them in a good mood,” said Daniel Cornejo, who is the physical therapist of the Chilean team. It is already his third World Games. Working as a physical therapist for Special Olympics is just like any other job for him. “It’s the same bodies and the same muscle groups,” he said with a laugh as he walked back into the circle of his athletes.

Meanwhile, about 200 meters away, at the opposite stadium curve, Christopher Morahan has moved into position. Together with a friend, he holds a large sign with the Irish national colors that reads “Good Luck, Timothy. You do us proud”. Morahan works at the European Central Bank in Frankfurt and has come to Berlin to cheer Timothy on. And whenever Timothy, a towering athlete in the green kit of the Irish national team, rounds the curve, Morahan yells “Go, Timothy, Go!”

“Timothy is my brother,” said Morahan after catching his breath between cheers. “He loves running so much. He’s been doing this since he was eleven years old. Everyone in our neighborhood in Dublin knows him. Because they always see him running outside,” said Morahan. Every now and then, he interrupts the conversation to shout “Go, Timothy, Go!” Because Timothy is in the 5,000-meter race, that means twelve and a half stadium laps for him. And a dozen roars from his brother Christopher. He does it with full enthusiasm. This stadium curve is well filled with people in the green jerseys of the Irish national team.

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Their frenetic cheering also pays off. Timothy Morahan laps numerous competitors – some even several times. In the end, he crosses the finish line in third place. And because the large field of runners was divided into two categories – Division M and M2 – Moharan was even allowed on the highest podium. “This is fantastic,” he gushed after the award ceremony. And when he realizes that a German reporter is standing in front of him, he uses his freshly learned German. He begins with “Ich bin ein...”. One might expect him to finish with “ein Berliner” like John F. Kennedy did so many years ago. But in accent-free German, he continues “...5.000-Meter-Goldmedaillengewinner” [5,000-meter gold medalist].

Later, when an Irish reporter, who was also covering the Special Olympics World Games, asked for a message for back home, he simply repeated the sentence in English. Regardless of the language, the statement is true. And his brother Christopher is mighty proud. “I used to do a bit of running myself. There was some competition between us. But now it’s much better,” he says. According to Christopher, sports have changed Timothy. “Before he got involved with the Special Olympics, he did very little sports at all. But because of all the running, he has gotten really fit. And he has also become much more disciplined. He trains hard and runs almost every day,” said Morahan.

Matthias Hoffmann from Kiel was also in the same race. He stood next to Morahan on the podium as a bronze medalist. Hoffmann is also quite proud of his own performance. “It was a good race. The atmosphere was simply magnificent,” he said. In addition to training, Hoffmann works as a kitchen assistant in a workshop for differently-abled people in Schleswig-Holstein. Like his opponent from Dublin, he also trains almost every day. “Sports help me switch off,” he said. Even before him, teammate Annika Meissner ensured a German medal. She won silver in the women’s 5,000-meter race. “The day started really well for us,” she said, beaming. “The race was fun, and I also achieved a personal best.” After all, that’s what the Special Olympics World Games are all about: Winning against yourself and getting the best out of yourself. “I showed what I could do and made people proud,” she said.

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Preparing for the World Games meant certain sacrifices for Meissner. “I trained a lot and hardly had time for my friends. Not even for my boyfriend with whom I like to spend a lot of time. But the preparing for the Games was more important. He knows that too. And he must be proud of me because he watched the race on TV. Tonight we’ll call each other,” she said. Like her, her boyfriend works in the Hinterland workshops of Lebenshilfe Marburg-Biedenkopf. However, he will have to do without her for a few more days. That's because she also has her sights set on a relay race and the 1,500 meter race. An impressive undertaking. And perhaps another reason to cheer.

Timothy Moharan also has more competitions coming up. He is entered in the long jump. And he is likely practicing his next German sentence: “Ich bin ein Medaillengewinner im...” [I am a medal winner in]. His brother Christopher will surely be ready with the banner at the sidelines. After all, the Special Olympic World Games are also a family event.

Text: Tom Mustroph

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