

## **Tatyana McFadden**

### **Paralympic Phenomenon**

Tatyana McFadden was born in Russia and spent the first six years of her life in an orphanage. Tatyana was born with spina bifida, a hole in her spine, which left her paralyzed from the waist down. Growing up in the orphanage, she didn't have a wheelchair, so she learned to crawl and walk around on her arms in order to keep up with the other children. Tatyana was adopted by the Commissioner of Disabilities for the U.S. Department of Health, Deborah McFadden, who brought her to the U.S. to give her a wheelchair and a new life.

The upper body strength Tatyana began to develop as an orphan in Russia soon turned her into one of the world's greatest Paralympic athletes. In the U.S., Tatyana tried a variety of sports using her wheelchair, including basketball, swimming, ice hockey, and scuba diving. It was wheelchair racing that she found both joy and success. In high school, Tatyana was not allowed to compete alongside able-bodied runners, competing in a separate race usually alone, until her and her family won a lawsuit against the school system. The lawsuit led to a state law and then a national mandate guaranteeing all students with disabilities the right to participate in sports.

At the age of 15, she became the youngest member of Team USA at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens, and brought home a silver medal in the 100 meters and a bronze in the 200. Tatyana went on to compete on the wheelchair basketball and wheelchair track teams at the University of Illinois. Before bringing home four more medals from the 2012 Olympics, she set the World Record in the 100-meter event. She also holds the world record in the 400, 800, 1,500 and 5,000 meters. At the 2008 Paralympic in Beijing, she earned four more medals. In London, in 2012, she added another four medals, three of which were gold. One silver medal also came from the winter Paralympics, where McFadden competed in cross-country skiing in Sochi in 2014.

Tatyana also began a professional marathon circuit in 2009, and she has swept the Boston, London, Chicago and New York City Marathon wheelchair races in 2013, 2014 and 2015, plus the Boston and London Marathons in 2016.

She was poised to make history at the Rio Paralympics, as she became the first to compete in seven events in wheelchair racing and had a shot to win seven gold medals. Tatyana won the 400, 800, 1500 and 5000, but fell short of her seven golds by earning silver in the 100 and the marathon. She and the U.S. were disqualified from the 4x400 relay.

When Tatyana was brought to the U.S., doctors told her mother she had little chance of being active or even surviving. Tatyana McFadden has surpassed all odds and become one of the world's top Paralympic athletes, with a total of 17 career Paralympic medals.

#### **Questions For Thought:**

1. Tatyanna was neglected in her orphanage in Russia, but her adopted mother gave her a new life. Who do you have to thank for your success?
2. Tatyanna used her strength in her upper body to her advantage in wheelchair racing. What are your strengths?
3. As a disabled athlete, Tatyanna could have given up, but she fought for her right to participate in sports. What are you willing to fight for?