

## Bringing Home Gold at the Transplant Games

By Jessica Logan | July 30, 2012

While many athletes will be competing for the gold in London this year, Louise Lermينياux and her close friend who gave her a kidney, Conna Jones, won gold in the 2012 Transplant Games of America in Michigan.



Southern California Team at the 2012 Transplant Games of America

“After I had a kidney transplant, one of the hardest pills to swallow was the idea that I might not be able to run again,” Louise said. “Due to a difficult recovery and multiple surgeries, I had to relearn how to run—not once but twice. Now I’m up to 4 miles of continuous running. I’m not close to the 26-mile marathon distances I use to achieve, but I am running again.

“If you haven’t been through a transplant surgery it is hard to understand. That is why it is such an amazing experience to compete in the games because everyone there gets it.”

Five years ago when Louise’s kidney function was in steep decline, the lifelong athlete didn’t know if she would ever return to running. She had polycystic kidney disease (PKD). About one-half of people with this genetic condition progress to kidney failure, also called end-stage renal disease. It caused Louise to scale back at work and with her athletics.

Louise was facing dialysis when she started searching for a donor among her friends and family.

One of her best friends, Conna Jones, turned out to be a match. In November 2008, Conna gave Louise a kidney at UC San Diego Health.



Conna and Louise at the Transplant Games in 2012

"I am deeply grateful to be alive and glad I am not dependent on dialysis," Louise said. "After having a transplant, you look at life differently. You know you are on borrowed time so you live life each day. The reality of needing another is a possibility, but I am doing everything I can to stay healthy."

By 2010, Louise returned to running and competed in the Transplant Games of America. She won bronze in the 5K, but a fall on a bicycle left her with a broken wrist that required a plate and pins to repair. "I came home with bronze and titanium," Louise joked.



Undeterred by her injury, Louise has promised to give her all at this year's games. She and Conna won gold in the 5K for their division, women from 40 to 49. Louise also won gold in three sprints and Conna won gold in badminton.

More than 1,000 recipients and living donors competed in the 4-day sporting event. In addition, several co-workers of Louise's from Life Technologies joined her in the 5k as well.

The camaraderie at these events has inspired Louise to continue running. She is considering going to the World Transplant Games in South Africa in 2013.

"When I go to these events, it gives me a lot of hope because I meet recipients from across the country who have passed 5-, 10-, 15-year milestones. There is a quarter century club for people who have made it 25 years. It gives me a goal to strive for and the motivation to keep living and competing."

The games also include several ceremonies to honor both living donors, and donor families who have lost a loved one.

"From a recipient's point of view, donors are the real heroes because they enable us to have this second chance at life," Louise said.

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