



FROM HURDLES TO TRIUMPHS: DAMIAN WARNER'S JOURNEY TO OLYMPIC GOLD

Every athlete competing at the Paralympic or Olympic Games takes a unique journey on their way to the top. While talent, great coaching, and years of hard work are elements almost all have in common, the elite athletes who represent our nation at the highest level often need to overcome seemingly impossible barriers to create opportunities for themselves. This is Damian Warner's story.



As the Tokyo 2020 Olympic champion, Damian Warner has established himself as one of the most accomplished athletes in the world. With his exceptional athleticism and versatility, as well as unwavering determination, Damian has risen to the top of his sport, setting records, and capturing the hearts of fans across Canada and beyond.

Born in London, Ontario, Damian developed a love for basketball at a young age. With the former Toronto Raptor Vince Carter as his idol, he had his hopes set on the NBA...or becoming an Olympic runner. His athletic abilities became evident early on, and he excelled in multiple sports, including basketball, and track and field. Despite his athletic talents, success started late in high school for Damian, leaving him with limited options.

"I remember sitting on the track after my final high school meet, and just crying because I thought my role in sports was over. No one in my family had attended university or played professional sports before, so I had no idea what was next for me. But I was lucky to have high school coaches who saw my potential and pushed me in the right direction."

Damian was then introduced to decathlon by his high school coach, who also helped come up with an academic plan that would get him into college and allow him to begin training right away.

"I didn't have many options, but I trusted my coaches, and decathlon ended up becoming the best thing that's happened to me. It's where I've met the most important people in my life, including meeting my partner Jennifer, and welcoming our son Theo."

When it comes to influential figures in his life, Damian attributes his success to a team of people — with the number one spot going to his mother. He also recalls a moment in high school where an anonymous person dropped off a box of track gear after seeing him compete and realizing his incredible potential, but also noticing he didn't have the right attire or footwear. It was a collection of moments like those that helped shape the path that ultimately led to his success.

Growing up in a low income single-parent household, Damian witnessed and experienced the burden parents can feel while trying to provide - and how easily a child can slip through the cracks if the right resources aren't in place.

"If it wasn't for the teachers and coaches who saw something in me, my story could be very different today. Supporting initiatives that promote and support accessible sports and recreation for kids coming from low-income households is important to me. I know firsthand it could be part of a moment that changes the trajectory of someone's life."

So, what advice would Damian give to his younger self - or his son when he gets older?

"You can do anything you set your mind to. That's the advice my mom gave me as a child growing up, and that instilled my ability to quiet the self-doubt when it becomes loud, and to stay goal-oriented and focused. It's helped make what could seem impossible, possible."

Now a *Team Toyota* athlete, Damian is looking ahead to the Olympic Games Paris 2024 and training rigorously to represent Canada at the highest level again.