

Dear Pro-Life Partners,

August 1, 2024

Ah, the Olympics! What a wonderful way to unify our country during this increasingly divisive time. This year's Olympics include 2 things I especially love...gymnastics and Paris (oui, oui), but watching excellence in any field is inspiring to me. Even more so when those in the limelight shine, not only because of their physical prowess, but because of their moral fortitude.

Allyson Felix, the most decorated track-and-field athlete in history, consistently demonstrates both. (Fun fact: She recently made #63 on ESPN's "Top 100 Athletes of the Century" list.) Amidst pressure amongst female athletes to terminate pregnancies rather than let children "ruin" their chances at athletic success, Allyson chose to speak out as an advocate for motherhood. Although not competing in this year's Olympics for the first time in 20 years, Felix teamed up with Pampers to create the first ever Pampers Nursery in the Athletes Village (NRL News, 7/16/24). This nursery will allow moms to bring their babies with them and spend time with them during the games.

Her vision has always been to encourage and enable female athletes to embrace motherhood, not reject it.

"I just knew how difficult it was to compete at the top level after I had my daughter, and some practical things were really hard. And so when I joined the Athletes Commission of the IOC, I really wanted to be that voice for athlete moms, and just take away one less thing for them to worry about in the pressure of competition. I think it really tells women that you can choose motherhood and also be at the top of your game and not have to miss a beat (NRL News, 7/24)."



After a negative experience with her Nike endorsement—they tried to force her to take a 70% pay cut while pregnant, she became a fierce advocate for other athlete moms. If Nike tried to penalize her for a lower level of performance while pregnant, essentially coercing her into putting her career above her child, how could other less-notable athletes stand a chance? She left Nike to demonstrate that motherhood should not hold women back from being extraordinary athletes (or anything else, for that matter.)

"Becoming a mom—it shifted my focus to thinking about this world that my daughter will grow up in. I don't want her to have the same battle. [Motherhood] gave me that final bit of push that I needed and helped me find my voice so that I could speak on these very important issues."

Note: In 2021, Felix created a child care fund for moms competing in the Olympic Games, and recently launched her own shoe line, Saysh. Since women's feet often grow and change during and after pregnancy, Saysh offers a generous maternity-friendly return policy.

Allyson Felix is another beautiful example of how becoming a mother does not hinder women; it enhances and empowers them. For more on Felix and others, continue below to read a reprint of my August 1, 2021 newsletter.

Partnering with You for Life,

Linda Verhulst, MRL-WR

The Olympic Dream – Do or Die

I have always loved watching the Olympics, way back to my first hero, Olga Korbut, in the 1972 Games. Then four years later, trying to stay loyal to Olga as Nadia Comaneci tumbled her way into our hearts and Olympic perfection. The Olympic Games have always given us the perfect platform for national pride and appreciation of excellence. How can we not marvel when witnessing the fruit of each athlete's dedication? How can we not tear up when seeing our flag raised and hearing the National Anthem celebrate an American victory?

Over the years, the stakes seem to get higher and higher as athletes must run faster, play better, jump longer, swim harder, throw farther, and flip higher just to qualify. They must dedicate their lives and often sacrifice their childhoods for just one shot to be the best in the world for that moment on the podium. The Olympic Dream can be so enticing that some may be compelled to give up everything to achieve it. Including life itself.

One such person was Olympic champion Brianna McNeal, who believed the lie that she could not be an Olympian *and* a mom. Brianna won a gold medal in hurdles at the 2016 Olympics and qualified for 2020. In order to compete, she had an abortion in January of 2020. While in bed recovering, the abortion left her “traumatized,” “shaken,” and “disoriented” (LifeNews, 7/19/21). She was so distraught that she missed a doping test by failing to open her door to antidoping officials. (She was banned from her sport for five years.) McNeal felt like abortion was her “only choice—her only ticket to success.” This is not an isolated incident. Sanya Richards-Ross revealed she had an abortion before the 2008 Olympics. “It seemed like I had no choice at all,” she stated in an NBC interview. “*Most* of the women I knew in my sport have had *at least* one abortion” (LifeNews, 7/19/21) Sadly, when the Tokyo Olympics was postponed until 2021, McNeal realized she could have had her baby after all.

There is at least one athlete, however, who sees things differently and is championing for a better way. Olympic champion Allyson Felix has launched a new support program that encourages female athletes to choose life for their unborn babies. Felix says, “As a mom and an athlete, I know first-hand the obstacles women face in sports” (LifeNews, 7/19/21). As a result, she founded The Power of She Fund, which provides childcare grants to mothers participating in the Olympic Games. Felix wants this charity to reflect that women are more than athletes, yet does not want mom-athletes to be penalized for choosing life. These grants, then, give these women the support they need to celebrate life while pursuing their dream. To date, at least nine other Olympic athletes will receive childcare support through Felix's program (LifeNews, 7/19/21).

I am incredibly encouraged by the initiative of Allyson Felix. Our hearts ache for those who feel pressured to put motherhood on hold for the sake of their career. We could opine that any dream that forces you to compromise your values is not a dream worth having. However, Ms. Felix demonstrates the strength and tenacity of a woman who does not deny her femininity; rather, she embraces and values it. She eschews the anti-woman, pro-abortion myth that women must sacrifice a life for their career. Other Olympians have shared powerful stories about competing while pregnant to prove that their babies' lives are worth sacrificing for (LifeNews, 7/19/21). Above all, Ms. Felix shows us that there is always a way to do the right thing, and if you put that first, it could pave the way for you to realize your dreams as well. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).