



## National Kidney Foundation™

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### BACKGROUNDER

#### **Transplant Athletics**

Twenty-five years ago, the idea of kidney or heart transplant recipients running a 50-meter-dash or swimming the butterfly stroke across a 25-meter pool was unthinkable. Even today, such a feat seems like a miracle.

But in 1982, a group of brave and determined transplant athlete pioneers gathered in Texas for the first regional U.S. Transplant Games and began changing the way people thought about transplant patients. The two-day athletic competition for transplant recipients served to dramatically demonstrate the life-restoring success of transplantation. Though small in scope, the Texas Games paved the way for future events. The next regional U.S. Transplant Games were held in Minnesota in 1988, with 70 participants hailing primarily from the Midwest.

In 1990, the National Kidney Foundation took on the management and organization of the U.S. Transplant Games, along with the event's co-founder Sandoz Pharmaceuticals Corporation, now Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation. Held in Indianapolis that year, the first-ever national event drew a record 400 transplant athletes from all over the country.

In addition to the rehabilitative benefits of this athletic competition, the U.S. Transplant Games provided a unique opportunity for transplant recipients to gather and share experiences, kindle friendships and celebrate their "ultimate second chance" at life while paying tribute to those who make it all possible—the donor families.

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The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) continues to organize this biennial Olympic-style event, which now includes 12 different sports competitions, educational symposia for transplant professionals and special programming for donor families. The Games have been held in Los Angeles, Atlanta, Salt Lake City, Columbus, Orlando and Minneapolis, growing significantly each time. In June 2006, a record-breaking gathering of 7,000 people, 1,200 of which were transplant athletes from all 50 states and five foreign countries converged in Louisville for the 2006 U.S. Transplant Games. More than 2,000 athletes are expected for the 2008 U.S. Transplant Games to be held in Pittsburgh, Pa.

In addition to planning national competitions, the National Kidney Foundation is also helping American transplant athletes make their mark on the international transplant athletics scene. The Foundation manages Team USA's delegation to the summer and Winter World Transplant Games, where athletes compete against transplant recipients representing countries throughout the world.

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