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Cedarville's Olympic Champion Nominated for ESPY Award

CEDARVILLE, OHIO – An ESPY award could be the next accomplishment for Cedarville University sophomore Grace Norman. The 2016 Paralympic triathlon champion was nominated for the Best Female Athlete with a Disability award, which will be awarded on July 12 in Los Angeles' Microsoft Theater. Former two-time NFL Super Bowl champion Peyton Manning will host the event.

Other nominees for the award include Oksana Masters (Nordic skiing), Tatyana McFadden (track and field), Becca Meyers (swimming) and Shawn Morelli (cycling).

The ESPY winners are selected by online or mobile voting at ESPN.com/ESPYS. The ESPYS and related events benefit the V Foundation for Cancer Research in memory of Jim Valvano, former head basketball coach at North Carolina State University. Valvano's 1983 team won the NCAA national championship, and 10 years later, he passed away from bone cancer.

Norman created excitement throughout the country when she became the first American, and the youngest member of the U.S. team, to win the triathlon at the 2016 Rio Paralympics. She followed her gold medal accomplishment with a bronze medal in the 400-meter run just 36 hours after the grueling triathlon.

This was an amazing accomplishment for the youngest U.S. triathlon athlete at the Games. Norman is the only Cedarville University student to ever compete in an Olympic event.

"Cedarville has been a huge support to me throughout the Paralympic Games," said Norman upon her return from Rio. "My professors were gracious enough to allow me to put my studies on hold while I was there. The love and support I received from Cedarville was incredible, and I am so grateful to be a Cedarville Yellow Jacket."

Leading up to the Paralympic Games, Norman endured 10 months of intense training. Her work paid off in many ways, including learning valuable lessons about life and helping others.

"One of the things I learned during the games was how to look at a challenge in a positive light," said Norman. "I was so sore and tired from competing in the triathlon that there was no way I could've done what I did in the 400-meter dash if it wasn't for the strength of God running through me."

But hearing the national anthem of the United States of America helped to ease the pain.

"I will never forget the moment I stood on the medal podium with my hand over my heart and heard our national anthem," said Norman. "When I started singing and the tears started to come, pride in my country and an overwhelming amount of emotion came up as I realized what I had just accomplished."

Norman's quest for Paralympic gold literally began within the first six months of her life. She was born without her left foot and ankle and her right big toe due to Amniotic Band Syndrome (ABS).

Norman's parents – Tim and Robin – cared for their young daughter as though she had no physical issues. She had two surgeries before her first birthday and learned to walk with the assistance of a prosthetic, which was fitted for her one month after her first birthday.

Norman's parents coached her on how to deal with struggles she faced from her condition. They also guided her athletically, which gave her the confidence to live just like anyone else and do whatever she wanted to do.

"Growing up, my body was able to adapt to using a prosthetic easily, so I was encouraged to play sports and not let anything stop me," said Norman. "I was also encouraged to not let what others thought of me become what I thought of myself."

Norman attributes her positive demeanor to her father, who is a professor of mechanical and biomedical engineering at Cedarville.

"My dad helped instill in me an attitude to never give up in the face of challenges. He pushed me to give my best in everything I did and to give all the glory to God," Norman stated.

Cedarville looks forward to seeing what "amazing" Grace has in store as she studies nursing and sets her sights on the 2020 Paralympics in Tokyo.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 3,760 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 100 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.