



## Overcoming Backstory

Marlon Shirley saw his fair share of struggles as a young boy, living with his mother who was gone a lot and moved frequently to keep trouble from catching up with her. Marlon was five years old when he was picked up by social services and dropped off at an orphanage where he began the "pinball life of an institutional orphan." In 1984, Marlon lost his foot in an accident with a lawnmower. The caretaker of the orphanage was letting the kids jump on an off the riding lawnmower while he mowed the lawn around the facility. Marlon slipped and the caretaker ran over his leg where the damage was done. Marlon later woke up with an amputation above the ankle.

Marlon bounced around to various foster homes over the years until he was adopted by a family from Utah in 1987. He took the Shirley's last name and feels blessed to have been found by them.

Marlon struggled through high school, trying to overcome the habits and tendencies of his past—of simply trying to survive. Mid-way through his senior year in 1997, close to flunking out and humiliated, Marlon had had it. He decided to do something with his life and signed up to participate in the Simplot Games in Idaho, the largest open high school indoor track meet west of the Mississippi. He hoped to get offered a college scholarship, but the odds were against him. Marlon had little track experience and was hobbling on crutches due to a fractured bone in his leg he obtained from dunking a basketball a few weeks earlier.

Marlon felt he had to do it. He entered the high jump, where he hopped over on his good leg and dove headfirst over the bar. He cleared 6'6", which just happened to be the Paralympic world record. A month later, Marlon competed in the Disabled Sports USA track meet in California, where he left \$13,000 richer.

Marlon Shirley has endured many situations which would have brought the average person to shambles. He has not only found a way to prevail, but has also found a way to be a world class athlete. He owns two world records: the 100-meter dash and the long jump. In 2000, at the Para-Olympic Games in Sydney he won the 100m dash and took silver in the high jump. Since then, not only has he become the first and only lower leg amputee to break the 11.00 seconds mark (10.97), Marlon has also run the fastest 200m dash to date.

At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Marlon Shirley won the Paralympic 100-meter gold medal for the second straight time. He has been called "the world's fastest amputee."

Marlon said, "It's something I train for every single day. It's almost just like an automatic movement of my body springing down the track. We all have our own type of disabilities—mine just happens to be physical, and you can see it very easily when I run. But you can't tell it by the time I get done racing."

Shirley's prosthetic foot is made of carbon fiber titanium, materials developed in the aerospace industry. He is clearly testing the limits of what a prosthetic foot can do.

"The feet? They've lasted me forever," he said. "I remember running around on crutches just like I'd run around if I had another foot," he said. "I definitely never looked at myself any differently than anyone else."

Marlon is a 10-time World Champion and Olympic Champion. He is the spokesperson for the Paralympic Movement and other sponsors. Marlon's biggest and most desirable goal is to be the first amputee to qualify for the 100m dash at the US Nationals against athletes with all limbs.

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