

Allyson Felix's childcare initiative: The lasting legacy of an Olympic great ^[1]

The most decorated female track & field athlete in Olympic history has long been an advocate for mothers in athletics. Now she has launched an initiative to offer free childcare grants and services to athletes.

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EXCERPTS

When USA track legend Allyson Felix qualified for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 she did so as a mother. Two years earlier, her daughter Camryn had been born via emergency c-section when the athlete was 32 weeks pregnant.

"Society tells us a lot of times that if you have a child [then] your best moments are behind you," Felix told reporters at the time of the US Olympic trials in June 2021. "But that's absolutely not the case. I am a representation of that."

Standing as an example of what can be achieved, the 11-time Olympic medallist - with two of those, a gold and bronze, won at Tokyo 2020 - has been an inspiration for athletes and mothers across the world.

Now she is taking things a step further by providing the sort of practical assistance that athletes who are mothers have missed out on until now: free childcare.

The idea blossomed out of a memory that Felix had of a track meet years ago in Arkansas, where a training partner had no access to childcare.

"During the race, she would pass off her daughter to athletes and different people on the staff," Felix said in a recent interview with Time. "And I remember when we watched the race back on TV, you could hear her daughter crying."

Inspired by this experience, and a post-Tokyo 2020 conversation with tennis legend Billie Jean King, Felix came up with a simple but game-changing idea:

"If there was something in place where we could just drop her [Felix's training partner's child] off, that would be less stressful," she said.

Now, just a year later, that idea has come to fruition.

"No woman should ever choose between her career and her family"

At this year's USA Track and Field Championships, Felix and her sponsor Athleta teamed up with a nonprofit named &Mother to provide free childcare to athletes and their support staff.

A local hotel ballroom was chosen as the venue for the childcare initiative, as the kids enjoyed activities such as ice cube painting and board games - completely free of charge.

It was a real-life example of how to solve an issue that has the potential to cause lasting damage to the livelihoods of many an athlete mom.

"No woman should ever have to choose between her career and her family, and our goal is to make accessible childcare a standard provision for working moms," Felix explained to Good Morning America.

"My hope is that this free and accessible childcare service in partnership with Athleta and &Mother will help raise awareness around the need for a better child care system — both in sports and beyond."

Supporting athlete moms through childcare grants

As well as offering free childcare at track meets, Felix and her partners are also providing USD 10,000 childcare grants to athletes who are mothers, with USD 200,000 already distributed since last year.

The list of recipients ranges from track athletes to tennis stars, and Olympians to Paralympians.

Among the names on the list are Aliphine Tuliamuk, the winner of the US marathon trials in 2020 who gave birth to her first child prior to the Tokyo 2020 Games.

Also on the list is bobsleigh star Elana Meyers Taylor who became the most decorated black Winter Olympian at Beijing 2022, as well as Rio 2016 Para-Cycling road race gold medallist Jamie Whitmore.

A sporting goodbye and a lasting social legacy

Felix, who is 36, is in the middle of a farewell season where she will bring down the curtain on her illustrious career in sports.

After the USA Track and Field Championships, she has a chance to race in the relays and 400m at the World Athletics Championships that take place in Oregon between 15 and 24 July.

However, this swansong was never about medals or adulation for Felix. It was an opportunity to spread a message that means more than any final piece of silverware that could hang around her neck.

“For me, this season isn’t about medals, it’s about raising awareness for an important issue facing all moms, including mom athletes,” the 12-time World Championships gold medallist said.

“I hope to use my platform to highlight the responsibilities of childcare and tackle the barriers women face in juggling their careers and caregiving roles.”

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: non-standard hours child care ^[4]

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