13 Famous Athletes Who Live and Compete With Asthma

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13 Famous Athletes With Asthma

If you have asthma, it can sometimes be hard to imagine running a mile, much less running a marathon or playing a full game of hockey.

However, it is entirely possible to be an athlete while having asthma.

Numerous famous athletes have asthma. In fact, The Globe and Mail reported that 700 out of the 10,000 Olympians who competed in the 2012 summer Olympics in London.

Here's a list of athletes with asthma.

Jackie Joyner-Kersee

Four-time Olympian and three-time gold medalist, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, wasn't diagnosed with asthma until she was a freshman at UCLA.

At the time, she was running track and playing basketball when she couldn't catch her breath.

Per her report, it took her several years until she took her asthma medications as prescribed. In 2000, she told Sports Illustrated, "I finally learned I had to respect asthma as much as I would an opponent."

Jerome Bettis

Football superstar, Jerome Bettis, was diagnosed with asthma at the age of 15 when he passed out during a high school football tryout.

However, he managed to keep it under control – he went to college at Notre Dame, became NFL's Rookie of the Year, played 13 seasons, and won a Super Bowl.

He reports that he even had an asthma attack during one particularly humid football game, although he kept an albuterol inhaler on the sidelines. It was treated with a nebulizer treatment, and he was able to return to play the game.

Dennis Rodman

The notoriously famous Dennis Rodman had an illustrious basketball career – spanning 14 seasons, winning five championships, and obtaining a league record in rebounding for seven straight years.

He accomplished all of this as an asthmatic – very impressive because basketball requires endurance.

David Beckham

Soccer superstar, David Beckham, is reported to have asthma supposedly since he was a small child, per the Daily Mail.

The news of David's asthma didn't surface until the past several years, although David had a very successful soccer career for about two decades prior.

Per his agent, "He has never sought to make it public but if it does inspire any sufferer to think they can achieve great things like many other sportsmen have done then so much the better."

Dan Girardi

Tampa Bay Lightning defensive man, Dan Girardi, has had asthma since he was a child.

Per his report, he has had a medical plan that keeps his asthma in control, which has allowed him to have a successful hockey career.

Amy Van Dyken

Olympic swimmer and six-time gold medalist, Amy Van Dyken, was diagnosed with asthma at 18 months old.

In fact, she came into her sport because she was encouraged to do so to strengthen her lungs. Amy states of her asthma, "I've never thought of it as an obstacle… It's actually made me stronger. Six golds in two Olympics."

Kristi Yamaguchi

Olympic figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi earned her first gold medal in 1992 in Albertville, France. She later went on to become World Champion twice, as well as National Champion. For those of you who are "Dancing with the Stars" fans, she was also a winner there as well!

Kristi was diagnosed with asthma as a child, but did not let her asthma stop her from becoming an elite athlete. In fact, not only did she medal in the Olympics and become champion, she became a spokesperson for the American Lung Association in 2011, advocating for those with lung conditions.

According to HealthGrades, Kristi's tip is to, "cover your mouth and nose with a scarf to help warm the air before it gets to the lungs."

Emmitt Smith

This pro-footballer was a running back and played for the Dallas Cowboys, ultimately playing in the NFL for 15 seasons. He is a three-time Super Bowl winner and holds the NFL record for rushing. He is the only running back to win a Super Bowl, the NFL most valuable player, the NFL rushing crown, and the Super Bowl Most Valuable Player award – all in one season.

Many argue that he is the greatest running back of all time – despite the fact that he played while battling asthma symptoms.

Dominique Wilkins

Dominique played professional basketball for the Atlanta Hawks, and was on the NBA all-star team in 1987, 1988, 1990, and 1991, and a basketball Hall of Famer.

He is quoted as saying, “Asthma is not a disability.”

His believe is that parents should do what they can to get their children playing sports and that asthma should not be a deterrent. Wilkins reminds parents that an asthma action plan and asthma management can help your children achieve their sports dreams.

Frank Lampard

Frank is the all-time leading scorer in soccer for Chelsea, and has been named as player of the year three times. He went on to play for Manchester City and then New York City FC, and retired in 2016.

He began suffering from asthma as a teen.

Lampard is quoted as saying, “My dad suffered from asthma and so did I as a kid. I used to suffer in games where I’d have attacks.” Despite this fact, he had one of the most illustrious football (soccer) careers ever, proving it is possible to be an elite athlete with asthma.

Robert Joffrey

For all you dancers reading, here’s one for you!

Robert Joffrey is a legendary dancer, teacher, producer, choreographer, and co-founder of the Joffrey Ballet. His ballet company was the first to perform at the White House.

Joffrey took up ballet as a child at the insistence of medical advice – his doctor believed it would help him control his asthma symptoms due to the breathing techniques taught. It taught him that, plus gave him an illustrious career.

Paula Radcliffe

Paula is a marathon runner and holds 10 world records for her long-distance running prowess. You would think that running long distances would be difficult due to asthma – but she manages.

Paula reportedly uses a preventative inhaler twice daily – once in the morning and once at night. She uses a rescue inhaler before exercising. She is quoted as saying, “If you learn to manage your asthma and take the correct medication, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t be the best.”

Dana Torres

Dana Torres is a record-breaking swimmer. She became the first US swimmer in history to compete in five Olympics, spanning from 1984 to 2008 and has won 12 medals.

But it hasn’t always been this illustrious. In fact, she actually retired at the age of 25. She had breathing problems since childhood due to a perceived chlorine allergy and it became too difficult to shoulder on. However, eight years later, at the age of 33, she had Olympic aspirations again and went in for a pulmonary work-up – and was found to have asthma.

At that time, Dana began a daily maintenance regimen her quality of life improved, as well as her level of performance.

Prior to an event, she uses fast-acting bronchodilator. She also uses her daily inhaler about two hours before an event. She ensures proper care of herself during illness, as her asthma becomes worse in these scenarios.

Dana says, “I like hearing their stories. I hope what I’ve done has helped inspire other people to do things they

thought they were too old to do.”

The "Asthmatic Advantage"

Maybe you’ve heard the term “asthmatic advantage” before.

The “asthmatic advantage” is the supposed performance enhancing effect from asthma medications – meaning, a puff or two from the albuterol inhaler may improve athletic abilities temporarily. Theoretically could be the reason why some of the athletes mentioned above are so elite.

As an asthmatic who has attempted many athletic pursuits, I’ve never considered having asthma to be an advantage.

Fluke or Flawed Research?

This theory spurs from the possibility that salbutamol may affect certain people differently if they have a genetic variant, making it so that the salbutamol gave them an “extra boost.”

The University of British Columbia, as well as several other research facilities, have debunked this theory. It appears that intense exercise improves respiratory function, as well as warming up before exercise.

Which means that all of these athletes, as well as others with asthma, are well-conditioned athletes who have learned to manage their condition.