

NINE GOLD MEDALS

Nine Gold Medals: About the poem

‘Nine Gold Medals’, written by the American Rock vocalist David Roth, is a song that inspires human compassion and cooperation. The poem is based on a story about the nine differently-abled athletes in a Special Olympic event. In a race, when one runner fell to the ground, all the others stopped and returned back to help him stand on his feet and then they walked hand-in-hand to finish the race. Each of the athletes was awarded a gold medal in recognition of their outstanding show of empathy and compassion.

Variations of the song are available on the internet. But the version sung by the Scottish singer Iain MacKintosh in 1996 is included in the ICSE board collection ‘Treasure Trove’. Though MacKintosh mentioned it as ‘a true story’ in his introduction, an online report claims it to be partly true. According to the folks at the Special Olympics Washington office, the incident happened at a 1976 track-and-field event held in Spokane, Washington. A contestant did take a tumble, and one or two of the other athletes turned back to help the fallen one, culminating in their crossing the finish line together,

but it was only one or two, not everyone in the event. The others continued to run their race.

However, beyond the authenticity of the incident, the poem ‘Nine Gold Medals’ conveys a great message to the humanity that the world now needs no more competition, but more cooperation and collaboration. This is very much relevant in our times when people forget to help one another in an unhealthy rat-race in every aspect of life.

Nine Gold Medals: Explanation by lines

The athletes had come from so many countries
To run for the gold and the silver and bronze
Many weeks and months in training
All building up to the games

Athletes have come from many countries all over the world to take part in the Special Olympics. They were there to compete for medals – gold, silver and bronze. They have gone through strenuous training for months to participate in the events with high hopes and dreams of winning medals.

All round the field spectators were gathered
Cheering on all the young women and men
Then the final event of the day was approaching
The last race about to begin

A large audience was present at the ground to cheer the participants of different events. They cheered and enjoyed throughout the day. Now it was time for the final event of the day – the race. People were eagerly waiting for the event to begin.

The loudspeakers called out the names of the runners
The one hundred metres the race to be run
And nine young athletes stood there determined
And poised for the sound of the gun

The names of the runners who would take part in the hundred-metre race were announced. There were nine participants, all determined to win the competition and lined up behind the starting point. They were ready to start, waiting for the sound of the gun.

The signal was given, the pistol exploded
And so did the runners on hearing the sound
But the youngest among them stumbled and staggered
And he fell on his knees to the ground

The pistol exploded signalling the start of the race. All the runners charged ahead along their respective tracks. But suddenly, there occurred an unexpected thing. The shortest athlete among them stumbled and staggered, and fell on his knees to the ground, the asphalt track.

He gave out a cry of frustration and anguish
His dreams and his efforts dashed in the dirt
But as sure as I'm standing here telling the story
Now it's a strange one, but here's what occurred

Nothing could be more frustrating for a differently abled athlete after such tough training. The moment he fell, he knew all his dreams, hopes and efforts were dusted. His pain and disappointment made him give out a cry. But it did not end here. There occurred something really strange following his fall.

The eight other athletes stopped in their tracks
The ones who had trained for so long to compete
One by one they turned round and came back to help him
And lifted the lad to his feet

Strangely enough, the eight other athletes who were ahead of him stopped in their tracks. Though they had trained hard for so long to compete with one another and win medals, the fall of one athlete changed their minds. They now returned one by one and helped the fallen one stand up on his feet.

Then all nine runners joined hands and continued
The one hundred metres reduced to a walk
And the banner above that said "Special Olympics"
Could not have been nearer the mark

Then all the nine athletes joined hands and walked to the finishing line together. The hundred metre race was reduced to a walk. But still, it was special for the great display of human compassion, cooperation and sportsman spirit. It could not have been more special in any way.

That's how the race ended, with nine gold medals
They came to the finish line holding hands still

Thus the race ended with nine athletes holding their hands right to the finishing mark. They won nine gold medals – one for each — very deservedly.

And the banner above and nine smiling faces
Said more than these words ever will
Said more than these words ever will

The nine sportsmen stood in smiling faces under the banner that declared it as a 'Special Olympics'. Those smiling faces touched the heart of everyone present there. It delivered something special – a great feeling and a great lesson – this mere poem is not enough to express. It was beyond words.