

Mayo Clinic News Network

Title: Still in the Running Thanks to Kidney Transplant / Date: August 16, 2016

The 2016 Olympic Games are underway. Gold medal hurdler Aries Merritt came within an eye blink of making the U.S. team to defend his title. Only a scant .01 seconds at the track and field trials in July kept him from making the trip to Rio. But, the fact he was even in the running is a major victory in itself.

Just one year ago, [kidney disease](#) threatened not just Merritt’s career, but also his life. [Mayo Clinic](#) physicians figured out what was making him sick, and guided him through the [kidney transplant](#) that put him back in the race. His [living donor](#) hero turned out to be his own sister. Dennis Douda has more.

Video	Audio
Total running time 4:06	/// VIDEO
Dennis Douda speaking	To watch Aries Merritt in training is to behold the ultimate in focus, precision, and determination. Peak performance in every aspect of his sport is what allowed Aries to become a celebrated Olympic gold medalist and the world record holder in the 110 meter hurdles.
TITLE: Andreas Behm Aries Merritt’s Coach	“He was a gymnast as a kid, so he has very good body control. He’s very wiry and explosive and he kind of grew out of gymnastics and that’s how he fell into track. He’s also the ultimate competitor.”
Dennis Douda speaking	It’s hard to imagine that this elite athlete, capable of working so hard in the 110 degree desert heat of Phoenix, was nearly forced to abandon his career less than a year ago, because of kidney disease.
TITLE: Aries Merritt Olympic Gold Medalist	“Well, I have collapsing FSGS. It’s a really long term that I don’t know how to pronounce well, so we’re just going to call it FSGS.”
TITLE: Janna Huskey, M.D. Nephrology Mayo Clinic	“... or focal segmental glomerulosclerosis. FSGS really is a variety of diseases. It is a disease of the filtering system of the kidney, which results in having protein leaked into the urine and, over time, this leads to scarring in the kidney and, ultimately, kidney failure.”
Andreas Behm speaking	“First off, he basically had very little energy to train.”

Dennis Douda speaking	His coach, Andreas Behm, says to try to slow the disease's progression, Aries' diet had to be greatly restricted. He was allowed no salt, no potassium and very little protein.
Aries Merritt speaking	"You need all of those things to perform well. And I was very limited by not being able to breathe, ah, after – after exertion. It was just really hard for me, feeling like I'm going to throw up after every race. It was really, really bad."
Dennis Douda speaking	Given just two options, a kidney transplant or dialysis, transplant clearly offered the best chances of keeping Aries' athletic dreams alive.
Dr. Jana Huskey speaking	"And in addition, we can actually allow people to live longer with a transplant than we can if they stay on dialysis. So there are many different reasons why we would transplant someone."
Aries Merritt speaking	"So I called my sister and I let her know. And then she just hung up the phone and before I knew it, she was out here and she was getting tests done."
LaToya Hubbard speaking	"If he ever needed anything, I'm gonna make sure I'm there."
Dennis Douda speaking	Aries' sister, LaToya Hubbard, says she has always been his biggest fan.
LaToya Hubbard speaking	"That's in Brussels. That was the day he actually set the world record running a 12:80."
Dennis Douda speaking	Given the chance to preserve their lifelong bond, as well as her brother's passion for performing on the track, LaToya didn't hesitate to offer Aries one of her kidneys.
TITLE: LaToya Hubbard Aries' Sister	"I just look at it as him doing something that he loves, him actually getting out there to step on that line to do his craft."
Dennis Douda speaking	With LaToya given the go-ahead as a match, Mayo Clinic surgeons performed Aries' living-donor organ transplant. Amazingly, just days earlier, he'd won a bronze medal at the 2015 World Championships. But, with his failing kidneys functioning at just 20 percent efficiency, he needed her gift more than ever.
Aries Merritt speaking	"She's my sister. She's my best friend and for her to give me her kidney and give me a life, um – have me able to keep my life going the way I wanted it to go"

	and, you know, to give me a piece of her life, it's amazing."
LaToya Hubbard speaking	"I love my brother very much. Everything is from the heart."
Dr. Jana Huskey speaking	"You're giving a kidney to someone, you know, and you're changing their lifestyle. You're changing their life really. It's the best gift you can give anyone."
Andreas Behm speaking	"The Mayo Clinic really never gave up. It wasn't necessarily just about him as an athlete. It was about his quality of living as a person, first and foremost. And then anything he could do athletically became a -- you know, became a bonus after that."
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Anchor tag: Dr. Huskey says receiving a kidney from a living donor offers several benefits. The transplant generally takes place sooner, because the patient doesn't have to be on the waiting list. She also says kidneys from living donors tend to be healthier, so they usually start functioning faster after transplant, and last longer.

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