

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
#305

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with Bob Richards who is known as the "Pole Vaulting Parson". He was born Feb. 26, 1926 and is an ordained minister with the *Church of the Brethren*. He is also a famous athlete and an Olympic pole vaulting champion. He earned 20 AAU titles, and 3 Olympic medals. He is the first athlete to appear on the front of a box of Wheaties. Among his many other honors he was elected to the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 1983. Billie Jean King attended his church. When she was only 13, or 14 years of age he inspired her to want to be the best tennis player in the world. He has also inspired millions of others through his sermons, motivational talks, and his book *The Heart of a Champion*. As a famous athlete, Bob discovered that the secret to success in athletics is not your body but your heart. His book *The Heart of a Champion* is filled with examples of champions who had the heart to overcome tremendous physical handicaps.

- Glenn Cunningham was so badly burned at the age of 5 that the doctors predicted he would never walk. He overcame this handicap and set the world's record for the mile run in 1934.
- Johnny Fulton was run over by a car at the age of 3. His hips were crushed, his ribs broken, his skull fractured, and he suffered compound fractures in his leg. No one expected him to live, but he became a track star running the half mile in 1:49.5.
- Walt Davis was totally paralyzed by polio at the age of 9. In 1952 he became the Olympic high jumping champion of the world.
- Shelley Mann was paralyzed by polio at the age of 5. She overcame that handicap and won a gold medal at the Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia. She also set 8 different swimming records for America.
- Howard Connolly won the Olympic hammer throw despite a crippled left arm that had been broken 13 times.
- Babe Didrikson Zaharias was so poor that she trained for running the hurdles by jumping shrubbery in the neighbor's yard. She won the gold medal in hurdles at the 1932 Olympics.
- The pistol shooting champion of the 1952 Olympics lost his right arm 6 months after winning his gold medal. He trained the next 3 ½ years with his left arm and won his second gold medal.
- Tenley Albright was born with crippled legs and the doctors expected her to be an invalid. She overcame her handicap and became the Figure Skating Champion of the world.
- Bill Nieder broke the world's record in the shot put after being told by his doctors that the many operations on his stiff right leg would keep him from competition.
- Keith Forbes set 4 American swimming records in spite of a crippled hip that prevented him from kicking normally.
- Herb Elliot came back from a broken foot to run the mile in 3:53.5.
- Lou Gehrig was once a fat bungling kid who made so many mistakes his team mates begged him to quit. He decided to make one less mistake every day and went on to the Hall of Fame.
- Rocky Marciano's arms were once so weak that he could only box two rounds at a time. Instead of quitting he decided to overcome his handicap. He trained by shadow boxing with his arms under water and went on to become the undefeated Heavy Weight Champion of the World.
- Bob Mathias broke the Olympic decathlon record despite the handicap of a pulled muscle.
- Roger Bannister broke the 4 minute mile for the first time on a track soaked by 5 hours of rain.
- Ben Hogan won the National Open after recovering from a debilitating car wreck.
- Many other athletes, of course, continue to manifest the "Heart of a Champion" after Bob's book was published. In 1960, for example, Wilma Rudolf was the first woman ever to win 3

gold medals in track and field at the Olympic Games. Sadly, Wilma began her life with many physical problems. She was born prematurely with complications. As a small child she contracted double pneumonia twice and also had scarlet fever. Then she contracted polio that left her with a crooked left leg and a foot that turned inward. She wore braces for 6 years. At the age of 12 she was 6 feet tall but only weighed 89 lbs. Miraculously, in 1956 she made the Olympic team and even won a bronze medal in Melbourne. She returned to America, however, determined to go for the gold. In those days there were no athletic scholarships and she paid her own way through college. To be on the team she had to take 18 units and maintain a B average. She not only did this, but would slip down the fire escape at night for a couple of extra hours on the track. Her moment of glory came in Rome in 1960 when before 80,000 cheering fans she won gold medals in the 100 and 200 meter dashes, and also the 400 meter relay.

Surely you get the point. You can become a champion without a champion's body, but not without a champion's heart. The same is true regarding champions in the church. Regardless of the difficulties that stalk their path these champions for Christ forge ahead with their eye on the goal. Remember! "Out of the heart proceed the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Paul put it like this: **"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24-27).**

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce