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Wyomia Tyus

Angel Sloss

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Wyomia Tyus

Wyomia Tyus (August 29,1945) was born in Griffin, Georgia. Tyus was the fourth child and only daughter of Maria and Willie Tyus¹. Wyomia's beginning was humble as her mother Maria was a laundress, and her father Willie, a dairy worker. The Tyus's always encouraged Wyomia to play competitive sports, and during her high school years, she decided to leave playing basketball to participate in track and field.

In 1961 Ed Temple, the world-renowned coach of Tennessee State University (TSU), who was visiting Georgia High School's State Track Championship, was impressed by the young Wyomia Tyus. Coach Temple, who was known for the TSU Tigerbelles and training Olympic champions, asked Tyus to join his summer track and field camp². Wyomia was so talented in track and field that her peers raised money for her to attend the Nashville based summer camp. At the age of seventeen, Wyomia competed in the Amateur Athletic Union Championship in 1962 (city: Los Angeles). Tyus won the 100-yard dash, thus setting a record for her age category. Tyus returned to Griffin High School, graduating in 1963.

Before attending TSU, Wyomia Tyus went on to compete in the AAU senior women's meet. Although it was her first time competing in the senior women's meet, Tyus placed second to Edith McGuire. Edith McGuire went on to become a gold medal Olympian, but from the AAU meet, Edith and Wyomia became lifelong friends and trained under Ed Temple. According to Linet³, the friendship was instantaneous. Tyus and McGuire endured much adversity as female athletes in the 1960's. Tyus and McGuire had to train on a dirt track riddled with potholes. The potholes were so deep; they filled with water; however, that did not stop Wyomia. Wyomia Tyus

¹ Linet, *Scribner*, para 1

² Linet, *Scribner*, para 3

³ Linet, *Scribner*, para 4

pushed her training into overload, defeating her friend McGuire in the AAU 100 meters in 1964, thus earning a spot on the United States Olympic Team.

Tyus attended her first Olympic competition in Tokyo, Japan (1964). Wyomia, who was only nineteen years old when she ran the 100-meter dash in 11.2 seconds in the preliminary heat tying Wilma Rudolph's world record and went on to win the gold medal. That year she also was a member of the American 4 x 100-meter relay team, which won a silver medal. In 1965 and 1966, Tyus took the outdoor 100-meter AAU championship. In 1966, she also won the 220-yard dash. Indoors, she won the 60-meter dash three years in a row (1965-1967), setting new world records each time⁴. At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, Tyus again took the gold in the 100-meter dash and again set a new world record. She also anchored the gold medal-winning 4 x 100-meter relay team, again setting a new world record time.

After the 1968 Olympics, Wyomia retired from track and field. She moved to Los Angeles, where she met and married Art Simburg, which she later divorced. In 1973, Tyus agreed to participate in the Professional International Track Association's only women's event, the sixty-yard dash. In her second year as a professional trackster, Tyus won all twenty-two of the events she entered, impressing both competitors and fans with her agility⁵. Wyomia found love in 1978 and wed now-husband Duane Tillman (hospital official). Tyus gave birth to two children Simone and Tyus. Wyomia has worked as a teacher, public relations specialist, and TV commentator for track events. Additionally, she has worked with the U.S. Olympic Committee and the Black Studies Center at UCLA⁶.

Currently, Wyomia Tyus still resides in Los Angeles, California. She has not financially benefitted from her track career through endorsements like the athletes of today. However,

⁴ Tennessee State University, *Wyomia*

⁵ Linet, *Scriber*, para 5

⁶ Tennessee State University, *Wyomia*

Wyomia's contribution to track and field have pathed the way for many other great black tracksters. Tyus endured racism and discrimination with her unwavering strength during the civil rights era.





The 1966-67 Tigerbelles in their brand new uniforms. Front: Marcella Daniels, Lottie Thomas, Diana Wilson, Mattilene Rrender, Martha Watson. Back: Wyomia Tyus, Una Morris, Elearnor Montgomery, Madeline Manning, Estelle Baskerville.

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