



## Transplant Games - 2010

I was in Madison, WI to participate in the bi-annual **Transplant Games**. The event drew about 8,000 people, with over 1,600 athletes. It is so inspiring to participate and to see these individual's push themselves to the limit in the equivalent to the Olympic summer events. While the winners certainly get accolades (and Gold, Silver and Bronze medal recognition), it is the struggling athlete that actually draws the most from the tremendous crowds. Many athletes, especially the ones finishing last react as if they've won the Gold Medal. The crowds' applause confirms their accomplishment. More than any other competition I have experienced, fellow athletes and spectators show tremendous support and encouragement to all that participate. Many are there just in recognition of their thriving health as a result of someone (or some family's) self-less organ donation.

The aspect that I did not fully appreciate until I experienced it first hand was the deep and sustained "connection" that the thousands of donor family members have to the games. Many attend these events as a means to celebrate and honor their loved one's lives. Some come to cheer on the athlete who has received a life saving organ from a loved one...truly a moving site. There is a tremendous focus and well deserved recognition given to these families and the difficult **gift of life** decision they had to make during a time of such personal loss. The Living Donors are also duly recognized for their **gift of love**. In an Olympic style opening ceremony, the Living Donors and the Donor Family Members are the last two groups to enter the stadium. They receive a thunderous standing ovation.

**The goal of the games is to encourage transplant recipients to stay strong and live life to the fullest. The other key purpose of this event is to focus attention on the need for donations. Throughout the program, the message that over 100,000 people are still waiting for a life saving transplant is clear, and the call to action for all of us is paramount.**

Harvey Mysel is a kidney transplant recipient and Founder of the Living Kidney Donors Network, a nonprofit organization that offers Workshops to educate people in need of a kidney transplant about living kidney donation and helps prepare them to effectively communicate their need to family members and friends. This was my second Transplant Games. I was honored to attend and participate; I received a Gold Medal in the 2008 Games and 2 Gold and 1 Silver Medal in the 2010 Games.