

Aimee Mullins

Athlete, Actress, Board Member and Inspirational Speaker

.....first received worldwide media attention as an athlete. Born without fibulae in both legs, Aimee's medical prognosis was bleak; she would never walk and indeed would spend the rest of her life using a wheelchair. In an attempt for an outside chance at independent mobility, doctors amputated both her legs below the knee on her first birthday. The decision paid off. By age two, she had learned to walk on prosthetic legs, and spent her childhood doing the usual athletic activities of her peers: swimming, biking, softball, soccer, and skiing, always alongside "able-bodied" kids.



After graduating high school with honors, Aimee was one of three students in the US chosen for a full academic scholarship from the Department of Defense, and at age 17 became the youngest person to hold a top-secret security clearance at the Pentagon. She worked there as an intelligence analyst during her summer breaks.

It was at this time that she rediscovered her love of competitive sports. While a dean's list student at the prestigious School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, she set her sights on making the US Team for the 1996 Atlanta Games. She enlisted the expertise of Frank Gagliano, one of the country's most respected track coaches. Through this partnership, she became the first woman with a "disability" to compete in the NCAA, doing so on Georgetown's nationally-ranked Division I track team. Outfitted with woven carbon-fiber prostheses that were modeled after the hind legs of a cheetah, she went on to set World Records in the 100 meter, the 200 meter, and the long jump, sparking a frenzy over the radical design of her prototype sprinting legs.

After a spread in Life magazine showcased her in the starting blocks at Atlanta, the world took notice. Aimee soon landed a 10-page feature in the inaugural issue of Sports Illustrated for Women, which led to her accepting numerous invitations to speak at international design conferences. Being exposed to this discourse relating to aesthetic principles, she became interested in issues relating to body image and how fashion advertising impacted standard notions of femininity and beauty. In 1999, Aimee made her runway debut in London at the invitation of one of the world's most celebrated fashion designers, Alexander McQueen. Walking alongside the supermodels of the world, Aimee's groundbreaking, triumphant turn captured the attention of the fashion media, propelling her onto the magazine covers of ID and Dazed and Confused. Conquering the fashion magazine standards of Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, W, Glamour, and Elle, she was also named as one of People magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People in the World."

An influential voice in today's changing youth culture, she has been named as one of Esquire's "Women We Love," one of Jane magazine's "10 Gutsiest Women," one of Sports Illustrated's "Coolest Girls in Sport," and was celebrated as the "Hottest Muse" in Rolling Stone's annual Hot List.

In addition to her professional career, Aimee serves on numerous boards and spends much of her time assisting various non-profit organizations, most notably Just One Break and the Women's Sports Foundation. Aimee serves as Vice-President for J.O.B., the nation's oldest non-profit employment service for persons with disabilities, founded in 1947 by Eleanor Roosevelt, Orin Lehman, and others. After serving as a Trustee for the WSF, founded by Billie Jean King, she was elected as the foundation's President, a position she stewarded from 2007 to 2009.

At such a young age, she has already been immortalized in exhibits at institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the NCAA Hall of Fame, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate Modern, the Track and Field Hall of Fame, and the Women's Museum, where she is honored for her contribution to sport among the "Greatest American Women of the 20th Century." She resides in New York City.

Her film debut was a starring role in the highly-acclaimed film by contemporary artist Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*, first presented in the US at the Guggenheim Museum in 2003. *Cremaster 3* is an astonishing work of creativity, and was lauded by *The Guardian* as "the first truly great piece of cinema to be made in a fine art context since Dali and Bunuel filmed *Un Chien Andalou* in 1929. It is one of the most imaginative and brilliant achievements in the history of avant-garde cinema." Aimee's recent films include *Quid Pro Quo* and the upcoming *Into the Woods*, scheduled for theatrical release in 2010.

Sample speeches include:

From “Overcoming” to “Embracing”: Seeing Opportunity in Adversity. Adapting is essential in order to change your perspective to one of constant discovery. Curiosity is one of the most effective business tools! There is real value in holding onto a sense of “childhood naiveté” as source of creativity and possibility in problem solving. Aimee’s varied and unlikely experiences on the track, in front of the camera, and in the board room have given her the ability to view challenge from a unique place. Showing the power in possibility as a first response in any situation ensures that businesses innovate and accommodate change.

In The Starting Blocks: Personal Leadership – how to exemplify fearlessness in the face of change and challenge, and how to instill that quality in others. Fear, uncertainty, and insecurity exist -- and although we all experience those debilitating feelings at certain times -- we can choose instead to proactively move through our challenges with an eye toward a positive outcome, ultimately finding the hidden gem that is the key lesson to be shared from every challenge. Aimee shows us how putting our egos aside can reveal to us a deeper sense of our own power, determination, and ability. With a strong personal foundation based in self-accountability, a leader inspires others by infusing energy through their own example.

”Poss” Abled: Redefining [Our Own] Disability. Everyone has their “disability,” what they feel is their disadvantage in their personal or professional life. By understanding the partnership between what we perceive as our deficiencies and how they shape and enhance our creative capacity for problem solving, it gives us a different point of view; we can re-imagine ourselves as enabled. This shift in attitude is an important tool in developing business acumen. Moving from a sense of being disadvantaged to one of having a unique perspective and expanding possibility is the foundation of success.

New Identities: the Collaboration of Science and the Human Spirit. Today’s technology helps us have new bodies, but more importantly, it can change the way we relate to the world around us and vice versa. By rebuilding our bodies –and replacing the notion of “overcoming loss” with a sense of possibility -- we can resist old limitations and instead, create new identities based in potential. Every so often, technology transforms the way we think about elements of our everyday lives. Advances in prosthetic technology have both expanded the opportunities and enhanced the abilities of those who require them. These dramatic changes are flipping assumptions long-held by mainstream society upside down.