

Local athlete wins gold in 200 metre race at Special Olympics, Bronze in the shot put

By Brian Lockhart

Despite one disaster after another at this year's Special Olympics School Championships in Kingston, local athlete Yazmine Wilson-Daponte managed to win gold in the 200-metre race and bronze in shot put.

The athletes did well in the competition, but other circumstances made the track meet difficult.

First, their bus broke down on the way to the meet. Then the outdoor meet had to be cancelled due to the poor air quality from forest fires blanketing the region in smoke, making it unsafe to compete outdoors.

When the meet was moved to an indoor track at a military facility, a fire broke out in a speaker in the ceiling, and the venue had to be evacuated.

Even with all that, the athletes returned to compete.

Yazmine, who has autism and was the Autism Speaks Walk Ambassador last year, was the solo athlete representing Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary School at the games. She was the first to represent the school at the Special Olympics.

Yazmine lives in Shelburne but travels to school in Caledon East.

Previously, she attended the games as an elementary student at St. Benedict's in Orangeville.

She was very excited to be competing and stayed focused while maintaining an incredible school spirit.

“Three of the events were cancelled because of the smoke – track and field, soccer, and bocci,” explained Yazmine's mom Karrie Daponte. “The track events all moved indoors. To qualify, she had an amazing gym teacher, who did all her qualifying times and sent in her distance for running long jump and shot put. She plays so many sports but she likes to run.”

Yazmine was thrilled to receive medals at the event but was also just happy to be there competing.

“She was absolutely thrilled but even if she didn't get a medal, she would have been happy,” Karrie explained. “It was three days away from home and we stayed at a residence at Queen's University. The schools pay \$50 for athletes, and Special Olympics transports us, pays for our accommodations, and pays for everything. I was also a coach because the schools don't have that extra staff.”

While Yazmine plays other sports, the school competition requires a higher level of competition students must qualify for.

Her enthusiasm for her sports and talent on the field is an inspiring role for other Special Olympics athletes to follow.