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Swimmer Saves 20 Lives, Joins 2016 Refugee Olympic Team

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Yusra Mardini is a teen refugee, swimmer, and now a member of the first ever **Refugee Olympic Team**. But Mardini is also one another, more important person: a hero.

When the war in Syria escalated in 2015, Mardini and her sister left their home in Damascus to make a treacherous journey to Turkey, then across the Mediterranean Sea to smuggle their way into Greece. Twenty people were crammed into a dingy meant for only six, and the group set sail. On the voyage, the tiny boat began to flip, endangering the lives of everyone aboard, more than they were already endangered just from risking the journey.

“Only four out of the 20 on the boat knew how to swim,” said Mardini in an interview with **Rio2016**. “It would have been shameful if the people on our boat had drowned. I wasn’t going to sit there.” Mardini, her sister and one other refugee jumped in the water and swam for their lives, pushing the boat and all the people fervently praying inside across the Mediterranean and safely to shore. Mardini saved the lives of everyone in the dingy.

In September 2015, after arriving in Berlin, the young heroine was noticed for her fine swimming abilities and was recruited in June 2016 to join the very first Refugee Olympic Team to swim in the 2016 Rio Olympics.

“I think [at the games] I will think about my family, my coach, my friends and everyone that has helped me,” said Mardini. More than most, Mardini understands the power and strength of family, hope and courage. She hopes to be a flaming beacon of hope for Syrians and other refugees still making the epic journey to freedom and safety from oppressed communities. “I want to show everyone that after the pain, after the storm, come calm days,” said Mardini.

The game of life is the hardest to play and can seem impossible to win. The 2016 Refugee Olympic Team will serve as a strong reminder to all about what it means to be a true olympian—to show the world what strength and endurance really is—and to hope and believe for a brighter future. An Olympian is a warrior, fighting not for the gold, but for the right to win the game.



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