



Unstoppable

Featuring Jim Gruenwald

Two-Time U.S. Olympian; Pan American Games Bronze Medalist

We've all seen it before—those incredible winning streaks on which athletes or teams can sometimes go. It can happen in every sport and within the high school, college and professional ranks. At times, it might seem like they are unstoppable, like there's nothing that can keep them from reaching the top or that somehow destiny might be involved.

But even the most elite competitors and the most dynamic dynasties eventually see their run come to an end. It's almost impossible to sustain that level of success in today's sports world. There are simply too many challengers striving for the same goals, and the margin between success and failure is razor thin.

Jim Gruenwald has been on both sides of that coin. He has gone through seasons where he felt unstoppable and he was abruptly stopped short of his goals. Prior to the 2004 Olympics, Gruenwald was having a solid year when during the semi-finals of the world championships he dislocated his left shoulder in a match against Armen Nazaryan, one of the great Greco-Roman wrestlers of our time.

"It was the first time in my career I had not finished a match," Gruenwald recalls. "I was done. That crushed me and I started sobbing."

The doctors told him it would take at least a year to recover. The national tournament was six months away and the Olympic Trials were not long after. It didn't look good.

Gruenwald was fast tracked to the operating table 10 days later. He was in a sling for six weeks. With the situation out of his control, Gruenwald prayed.

"If you want me on this next Olympic team, then God, You're in control."

He kept praying and did what the trainers told him to do. And then, a week before nationals, the surgeon came to him with some surprising news:

"Jim, I don't believe I'm doing this, but I'm going to clear you to wrestle."

Gruenwald didn't just wrestle. He captured his second national title and had only one point scored on him throughout the entire competition. It was one of those unstoppable moments that all athletes long to achieve. But Gruenwald immediately recognized that it was nothing to do with him and everything to do with a higher purpose.

At the Olympics, Gruenwald finished in 10th place. It wasn't a great tournament. He didn't get what he wanted out the experience, but he got what he needed.

“If God wants something done, there's nothing that can stop it,” he says. “It helped me as a believer. I learned to rely on God and I discovered that He still answers prayers and He still performs miracles.”

There are many instances in the Bible where God showed us His unstoppable power. It can be found in epic stories such as Noah and the great flood, Moses and the Red Sea, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, and in many great Israelite battles.

“The Lord of Heaven's armies have spoken—who can change His plans? When his hand is raised, who can stop Him?” (Isaiah 14:27)

Even Job, a man who was relentlessly persecuted and tested realized that God was ultimately in control of everything:

After all he went through, Job said to God, **“I know that you can do anything and no one can stop you.” (Job 42:2/NLT)**

And there's no greater story of divine triumph than the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which gave us victory over sin and death.

God has empowered us to be victorious overcomers. That doesn't mean we'll never lose a match and that doesn't mean we'll always end up on top. The same is true in our Christian walk. We will certainly have troubles in this world, and it will never be a completely smooth, carefree path. But God has a plan for each of us, and as long as we follow Him, that plan cannot be derailed no matter how hard the enemy may try to stop it. After all, we have the Creator of the universe on our side, and He is, at His very essence, the ultimate unstoppable force.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever experienced a long season of success? If so, did you at times feel like you were unstoppable?
2. Have you ever felt the opposite and that something was keeping you from achieving your goals?
3. What do you think it means to have God on your side? Can you describe a time when you felt that way in your athletic career? What about in your everyday life?
4. Has there been a time when reading a Bible story gave you courage and helped you push through adversity? How do you think the story of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection should empower you to stick with the plan that God has laid out for you?
5. In what areas do you need to put your trust in God and rely on His unstoppable power?

Closing Prayer