

2nd September 2021

Triumph

**“If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat these two imposters just the same ...”**

Rudyard Kipling, If

When the story of the Paralympics in Tokyo is written, the name of Hossain Rasouli will not be in the forefront of people’s minds. After all, he only managed thirteenth and last place in the long jump. It wasn’t even the event he was supposed to be competing in, having been on the list to run in the T47 100m, and he’d never competed in a long jump event before. Indeed, he’d only arrived in the city three days before the competition, having had a troubled journey to get there. But he’s my triumphant hero today. Why? Because Hossain Rasouli comes from Afghanistan.

Rasouli’s dream of competing in the Games was shattered when the Taliban overran Kabul, leaving him and another Paralympian effectively trapped in the city, with no way of getting to Tokyo. The Afghan flag was carried at the opening ceremony by a volunteer, because all the country’s athletes were to be absent. But, remarkably, Rasouli and his colleague got out of their troubled country on one of the final flights.

First it was Dubai, then Paris, then to the French Sports Ministry’s high-performance training centre, before a flight to Tokyo. When he entered the almost deserted stadium for his competition, Rasouli, whose left hand had been amputated as the result of a mine explosion, pointed proudly to the Afghanistan Paralympic logo on his vest, as well he might.

I don’t know how he sees it, because, up to the time I’m writing this, he’d only said he was “super excited to be competing”. But I know how I see it. It’s a triumph! It’s a triumph for him, never mind where he finished in the long jump competition. It’s a triumph for the Paralympics. It’s a triumph for the people of Afghanistan. It’s a triumph of resilience over tragedy, hope over disaster, commitment over fearfulness.

Hossain Rasouli, you deserve a full stadium to rise to its feet and applaud you. You deserve the very best of medals for your triumph. Hossain Rasouli, today, my Afghan hero, I salute you.

A prayer for today

God bless Hossain Rasouli and his people. Let the triumph of peace be theirs. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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