

WCAP NCO forced to skip last race, but still closes strong at Rio Paralympics

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Sgt. Elizabeth Marks, Paralympic swimmer from the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program of Fort Carson, Colorado, did not participate in the SM8 200-meter individual medley competition in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, due to an undisclosed medical issue. (Photo courtesy U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program)

Sgt. Elizabeth Marks bowed out of what would have been her final race at the 2016 Rio Paralympics.

But that didn't rob fans of seeing her finish her inaugural Games in impressive fashion.

The Paralympic swimmer from the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program of Fort Carson, Colorado, said Saturday on Twitter that she would not participate in the SM8 200-meter individual medley competition, which was scheduled for that day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, due to an undisclosed medical issue. Her message exhibited the unselfishness that has garnered Marks so much attention this year.

"I didn't have my best to give, but another girl might," the tweet stated.

But Marks' best was definitely on display the previous night.

On Friday, Marks swam the second leg of the women's 4×100 medley relay. The Americans finished in third place behind Great Britain and Australia. While the finish wasn't golden, the fact that the U.S. team was able to reach the podium at all was an impressive feat given its difficult start. And Marks began turning the tide.

Hannah Aspden struggled as she swam the opening backstroke leg of the medley. She fell about five meters behind the pace of the leaders and came to the end of her 100-meter swim in fifth place, with sixth-place Japan not far behind. That's when Marks went to work.

The 26-year-old swam the breaststroke leg, the same event in which she had already claimed a Paralympic gold medal. Marks' effort during the medley was frenzied. She managed to speed into fourth place past the Netherlands before the turn. From there she closed the gap on third-place Canada to less than 10 meters. Marks did this despite being in the pool with five swimmers who compete in faster disability classifications. She would finish the leg with a time of 1:28.52, not even a half-second slower than her winning time of 1:28.13 in the SB7 100-meter breaststroke the previous weekend, which set a new world record.

It was prime position for her teammates Elizabeth Smith and Michelle Konkoly to wrest third-place away from Canada. It also ended up being the

end to her time in Brazil. Marks finished the Games with a gold and bronze medal, fitting hardware for a Soldier and competitor who has been in the headlines throughout the year.

Marks gained international attention earlier this year after asking Prince Harry to take one of the gold medals she won at the Invictus Games in Orlando, Florida. Marks wanted the British royal to give the medal to the English hospital that saved her life. In 2014, while traveling to the Invictus Games in London, Marks fell ill and required a lifesaving procedure at Papworth Hospital in Cambridge. She missed the Games that year, but said she was lucky to come home alive. Offering her medal to the hospital was the best way she could say “thank you.” The gesture caught the world’s attention, culminating with her being awarded the Pat Tillman Award for Service at the ESPYs in July.

Her ordeal in England wasn’t the first time Marks underwent a stint in the hospital. She suffered bilateral hip injuries while deployed to Iraq as a combat medic in 2010. Those injuries are what pushed Marks to the pool in the first place. She has previously stated that she hopes her accomplishments can offer faith and optimism to her fellow wounded Soldiers.

Now, armed with medals earned on the grandest stage in sports, it appears Marks will remain a beacon of hope for quite some time.