

## Traveling the Road of Dreams

Storms cleared just in time for the start of the [11<sup>th</sup> Annual Kessler Foundation Wheelchair 10K](#), the wheelchair division of the Fred D'Elia Ridgewood Run in Ridgewood, NJ. As one of the largest wheelchair races in the country, there was something extra special at this race—an added sense of urgency.

For the first time, the 10K attracted racers from Ghana and Zimbabwe—Patrick Obeng, 35, and Wilson Nyakoko, 36—thanks to the sponsorship of [Kessler Foundation](#). To qualify for the Paralympics, a division of the Olympics for people with disabilities, athletes have to log a specific number of competitive racing hours. Due to economic and geographic constraints, however, these athletes have limited opportunities to compete in international races. By competing in the 10K, they moved closer to reaching their Paralympic dreams.

Patrick was injured in a car accident, where he had to have his leg amputated. After enduring four years in the hospital, he returned home to find that he didn't have the opportunity to work. No one wanted to hire a man in a wheelchair. He then turned to wheelchair sports.



As Patrick explained, racing doesn't pay much. Wheelchair athletes don't get the major sponsorships that major league athletes receive. Without sponsorships, the sport and travel is expensive. While racing isn't enough to support his wife and five children, he enjoys staying active and being productive.



Wilson was born with spina bifida and is use to a life of disappointment. Unable to find work and tired of being treated as a second-class citizen, he invested his energy into wheelchair racing. When Kessler Foundation offered to sponsor his travel to the US so he could compete in numerous races, Wilson didn't believe it. He thought it was a scam that would lead to more disappointment. By the time he was convinced it was real, he almost missed the 10K and arrived the night before the race.

While most people would be exhausted by the travel, Wilson never showed he was tired. Not to mention, he had to compete in a 10K. But Wilson smiled the entire time. His reserved personality was complimented by his friendly smile. His time in the US represented his accomplishments as an athlete.

Competing internationally is not just a personal triumph. For these athletes, it's a sign of deep-seated social change. In Ghana and Zimbabwe, people with disabilities are often treated like second-class citizens and destined to a life of begging. Sports, however,

provide a sense of purpose and are a way for individuals with disabilities to be noticed for their abilities instead of their disabilities. One man, Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah, paved the way for athletes with disabilities by demonstrating how achievement in sports can change the mind-set of a nation.

When Emmanuel was born with a severely deformed leg, people told his mother to poison him. Instead, she was the first person to send a child with a disability to school; Emmanuel never looked back.



He refused to beg on the streets and opted to shine shoes, making less money than a beggar. But his real goal was to change Ghana's attitude toward people with disabilities and had a vision. First, Emmanuel applied for a grant for a bicycle. He got it.

Then he approached Sam Aidoo, a former Olympian runner, who is the technical director of the Paralympic Committee of Ghana, to be his coach. After extensive training, Emmanuel cycled 600 km across Ghana on one leg. This attracted the attention of his fellow Ghanaians, the government, and other countries.

As Emmanuel received sponsorship to compete in races in the US, he returned to a hero's welcome. The government acknowledged that people with disabilities can make contributions to society and started to expand their rights.

Emmanuel continues his commitment to Ghanaians with disabilities by providing wheelchairs to those in need and advocating for their rights. He plans to open a school for that is accessible, but also demands academic excellence. His goal is have a staff that is 40% people with disabilities so that the country can see they are viable employees.

Realizing the importance of Patrick and Wilson's race in the US, Emmanuel and Sam came to the Kessler Foundation 10K to show their support. They understood how every accomplishment is changing their country's treatment of people with disabilities. As Patrick and Wilson crossed the finish line, they exploded with pride and joy.



Patrick, a track athlete, had not competed in a 10k since 2004. He, however, improved his time by 10 minutes and finished second in the Male Open Division with a time of 24 minutes and 40 seconds. He crossed the finish line with a huge smile on his face and thanked God for allowing him to do his best.

Wilson completed the race in 37 minutes and 49 seconds.

Besides competing in the 10K, Patrick and Wilson had the opportunity to talk to athletes on the Kessler Foundation WheelBlazers, an adaptive racing team for adults with disabilities, and the North Jersey Navigators, a Kessler Foundation-sponsored adaptive sports team for junior athletes with disabilities. David Lowell, one of the longest members of the WheelBlazers, sponsored the hotel stays for the guests.

As [Kessler Foundation](#) sponsored Patrick and Wilson's travel and stay to the U.S., they were able to compete not only in the 10k but also in other races around the country. Three weeks after the 10k, Patrick [won gold](#) in the US Paralympic Championships in Florida. The championships served as the selection meet for the Pan American Games, which will be held in Guadalajara, Mexico in November. His Paralympic dreams are on the horizon, thanks to his sheer strength and determination and Kessler Foundation.

Click [here](#) for a complete list of Kessler Foundation Wheelchair 10k competitors with their course times.

Click [here](#) to view a slide show from the Kessler Foundation Wheelchair 10k.

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