

Olivia Hawes is not only a Commonwealth Games medalist, she holds a record that's not likely to be broken any time soon.

Olivia, a runner who took part in the 50 meter dash, now holds the record as the youngest participant in the Virginia Commonwealth Games history, young enough that her age is still stated in months. She took to the track at the tender age of 22 months. The event was held at the end of July, exactly two months shy of Olivia's second birthday.

For those at the Liberty University track at the time of the 2-and-under finals, the sight of Olivia running the 50 meters – from the starting line with her father Jason, to the waiting arms of her mother Angel at the finish line – the dash was a highlight.

Despite her age, Olivia has enjoyed running since soon after she could walk. Jason and Olivia run at a Lynchburg-area track, where he learned about July's Commonwealth Games at nearby Liberty University.

They decided to see if she could enter. When her entry was approved, they practiced the run, starting from dad and running to mom.

"We felt like she could do it, but we weren't sure how she'd react," Jason says.

The reaction ended up being the best part.

Jason Hawes describes the scene: "She was about halfway when the crowd noticed her, and they broke into a roar. That started to make her go faster. She stayed in her lane. Then she started clapping at the crowd."

Angel Hawes remembers the joy.

"Every time she runs a race, she hears the people cheering and she gets so excited," Angel says. "I look at the pictures and see all those big smiles."

The pictures were shot by others. Angel was recording video on her phone but as will happen in an exciting event, her concentration strayed from the task of keeping her hand steady. Hard to find fault in that.

At 22 months, it's not like running in the Commonwealth Games was Olivia's idea, but since her family lives in Lynchburg, they were well known and nearby. Jason takes Olivia to a local track because she loves to run.

"She's been running since she was 13 months old. She's been in gymnastics since the same time and she really enjoys both," he said.

Angel says when Olivia was asked if she wanted to run in a race, her answer was simply "Ya. I run. Go fast."

The concepts of competition and discipline are a bit advanced at the moment, but she'll come to understand what it means to train and compete. For the moment, Olivia just loves to run.

Jason, a former rescue swimmer in the Navy and a state champion in Greco Roman wrestling as a teen, is a sports enthusiast who believes in the advantages that training offers. He's such a detailed-oriented person he logged her distance every time she ran – ever.

"Before the race she had run or walked 36 miles," Jason says. "We signed her up for the Sesame Street 100 mile challenge where you run or walk 100 miles in a year."

Angel says the family is making running a race a positive event.

"Race days are fun days," Angel says. "We always do something super-fun afterward. It's an all-day fun day. You put in the work in the morning and then have fun all day."

Olivia has run in three races now, travelling to two out of town races and experiencing new places and new activities. Her running has motivated her young cousins into taking up running and accompanying her on the race trips.

"She just loves her little medals. Her cousins wanted to start running when they saw her get a medal," Angel says.

Angel says the benefits of training are already noticeable.

"We get to race day and she has that switch ready. When it starts you can see her focus in on me at the finish line," Angel says. "It's a privilege to be a part of it, to watch her love of sports and competition grow. I want her to have that foundation in discipline. This will help Olivia reach her goals."

Who knows how many record breaking performances Olivia has in her future, but she got one in her first race in the Commonwealth Games. It's going to be tough to beat.