

Ibtihaj Muhammad becomes first U.S. Olympian wearing a hijab

by [Aysha Khan](#) in the [August 31, 2016](#) issue

Ibtihaj Muhammad, a 30-year-old fencer, made history in Rio de Janeiro as the first U.S. Olympian to compete in a hijab.

Muhammad, who made Time magazine's 2016 list of the world's 100 most influential people, was a member of the 2014 world champion fencing team. At Rio, she was eliminated in her second bout in the women's sabre tournament on August 8.

Growing up in New Jersey, she was often harassed for wearing sweatpants and long-sleeved shirts beneath her volleyball, track, and tennis uniforms.

One day her mother saw a group of fencers, covered from head to toe as they practiced in the high school cafeteria. Beneath her headgear, her hijab would barely get a second look. "When you get to high school, you're doing it," Muhammad's mother told her.

She doesn't shy away from speaking up for the black and Muslim American communities. In March, she publicly commented about how a volunteer at the South by Southwest media and music festival demanded she remove her hijab to receive her ID badge.

"When a lot of people think of an Olympic athlete or an American Olympic athlete, they probably don't picture someone who looks like me," Muhammad said. "I love that I can be that image of change." —Religion News Service