LAMORINDA WEEKLY



Published September 3, 2008

# Lamorinda Olympians Represent the United States in Beijing

*By Jack Fernbacher*

Beijing 2008 Lamorinda Medal Winners

Three states in the union didn't send any athletes to Beijing, but the small tri-city community of Lamorinda had seven athletes compete in Beijing and won ten medals. To put that into perspective, the country of Romania only had eight medals in the Olympics. Carrying most of the load, Lafayette native Natalie Coughlin received six medals for swimming to become the first American female athlete in modern Olympic history to win six medals in one Olympics. Coughlin graduated from Carondelet High in Concord in 2000 and has earned a total of eleven medals in her Olympic career. Athletes from Campolindo High School won three medals in Beijing. Peter Varellas was a part of the Silver medal-winning US Men's Water Polo team, Kim Vandenberg earned a Bronze medal on a US relay swim team, and Jeff Stevens played on the US Baseball team that won the Bronze medal. "The whole experience was awesome," says Peter Varellas. "I was living with 10,000 athletes and would have breakfast with famous tennis and NBA players. The Olympics were definitely a success for me and something that I will never forget." A Miramonte High school graduate, three-time Olympian Heather Petri helped the Women's Water Polo team win the Silver medal. Although Petri didn't get the gold medal that she is missing from her medal collection, receiving the silver medal was still a remarkable accomplishment. Another Miramonte alumna who competed in Beijing was Beach Volleyball player Nicole Branagh. Branagh boasted a 4-1 record in the tournament and placed 5th. Branagh went undefeated in pool play, but lost in the quarterfinals to the bronze-medaled Chinese team. Grace Upshaw, who graduated from Acalanes, made her second Olympic appearance in Beijing. Upshaw qualified for the women's long jump final where she took eighth place. "Beijing was fantastic!" says Robyn Varellas, Peter's mother. "The venues, effort by volunteers and overall atmosphere were outstanding. The excitement and intensity of the water polo competition, with seven games over fourteen days, was amazing. The US team was focused and determined throughout. It was an honor to be part of it. The fans were great -

everyone was passionate and supportive of their country - but also very respectful of all the teams. The Olympic spirit was definitely upheld by all the fans and players."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com



Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA