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Natalie Coughlin Dares to Show Her Roots Oct. 26

By Laurie Snyder



Natalie Coughlin Photo provided

What does it take to get air guitarists in a room with history buffs and gimpy weekend outfielders? Natalie Coughlin.

The 12-time Olympic medalist will reveal her fascinating family tree at "Their Roots Are Showing!" Oct. 26. Presented by the California Genealogical Society and Library (CGSL), the sure-to-be-a-blast celebration of Family History Month will also feature a silent auction of celebrity memorabilia, along with the intriguing ancestry of Grammy-winning rock drummer, Tim Alexander, and Oakland A's general manager and "Moneyball" subject, Billy Beane, who has donated use of an A's luxury suite as an auction prize.

"Her story is a true American story," says CGSL's Therese Hart-Pignotti of Coughlin, whose family has serious American roots. One of the nation's two most decorated female Olympians, Coughlin recently returned from a USO tour at the Naval Station Rota in Spain where she conducted a children's swim clinic. Her mother, she says, "grew up on military bases. It's hard on the families. If the kids are in sports, they get different coaches every year." Coughlin, who mentors as time permits, muses, "I know when I was a kid and I went to a clinic where Olympians stopped by, I remembered it. We're all busy, and we have stresses, but it's important to make the effort."

Coughlin also continues to find fame beyond the pool. She recently shadowed a master chef and winemaker for Lifetime television's "Celebrity Bucket List," and has also appeared on the Food Network. "The way that I decompress for the day," she explains, "is to cook a great meal." She makes pasta "especially this time of year when it gets to be fall - and you love that cozy comfort. I love kneading and rolling out the dough - the product you get is so delicious and rewarding." Family and friends are often in on the nurturing noshes.

As for the horizon, "My next competition is going to be in Italy - the first and second weekend in November. And then I have short course nationals in Knoxville, Tennessee." She hopes that, in addition to cheering her on, fans will support one of her favorite charities, Right to Play (www.righttoplay.com). "They had a very big presence in the Olympic Village at Athens and especially at Beijing." A supporter since 2004, she did her first field work in Rwanda, fostering anti-malaria efforts by "teaching kids how to prevent and recognize the symptoms" through simple games of tag.

Coughlin also has a message for young Lamorinda fans who find it hard to fit everything into their own busy days. "There is enough time," she says. But, "It's important to have balance. When you're in school, focus on school." When you're with your coach and team, she says, "Focus on practice." And when you're with friends, just concentrate on enjoying the time you have. "It's really just being present in the moment."

"There Roots are Showing!" will begin at 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26 at Walnut Creek's Del Valle Theatre. For tickets, visit: www.lesherartscenter.org/event/california-genealogical-societys-their-roots-are-showing/.

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