

## SWIMMING



Jessica Long, a 15-year-old paralympic swimmer from Middle River, will find out tonight if she wins an ESPY for Best Disabled Female Athlete during ESPN's annual award show in Los Angeles. — Courtesy of Steve Long

# Long road to ESPYs for local disabled swimmer

## Middle River native holds 14 world records

By Kiel McLaughlin  
Special to the Examiner

Jessica Long was born without fibulas, ankles or heels and had her legs amputated below the knee when she was 18-months-old. She's only been swimming for five years, but the 15-year-old from Middle River has captured national attention — and could gain even more Wednesday night.

Long has been nominated for Best Female Athlete with a Disability at Wednesday's ESPY Awards, the annual sports awards show on ESPN, which will be broadcast Sunday night at 9.

"When we adopted her, we were worried about her being physically well and mobile," said Steve Long of his daughter, who holds 14 world records for disabled swimmers. "We

never imagined this."

Steve and his wife, Beth, understood Jessica's health conditions when they adopted the 13-month-old from Siberia. But they faced a difficult decision: amputation versus a series of surgical operations. But Steve said after reviewing the cases of children with similar conditions, he chose amputation.

"Growing up it made me want to try even more," Jessica said. "When I was younger it was more difficult. But, now I'm fine. There's nothing I can't do."

Jessica has played basketball and participated in gymnastics since she learned to walk with prosthetics at age 2. But when she was 10-years-old, she dropped all other activities in favor of swimming, which was much easier on her young body.

"She didn't wear the prosthetics during gymnastics, so her knees were beaten up and we didn't want it to hurt her swimming," Steve said.

Jessica's success does not surprise her coaches, who put her through grueling workouts against able-bodied swimmers at the Merritt Athletic Club in Towson five to

six days a week.

"When she won three gold medals in Athens [in 2004], it may have been surprising," USA Swimming coach Andrew Barranco said. "But she's very determined."

Jessica's swimming has consumed their lives.

"We plan family vacations around her now," her father said laughing. "We've been to Belgium, Germany, South Africa and Athens. We are looking forward to Beijing next year [for the 2008 Paralympics]."

Jessica said she plans on bringing home seven gold medals as souvenirs. First, though, is the ESPY Awards ceremony in Los Angeles. Long said an ESPY win would be shocking, but she cherishes being nominated for the award along with Esther Verger, a tennis player from the Netherlands, Stephanie Victor, a skier from Park City, Utah, and Amy Palmiero-Winters, a triathlete from Meadville, Pa.

"I hope that the Paralympics will become better known," she said. "I hope that other people see that I'm not giving up and that even able-bodied people can be inspired and see what can be accomplished."

## WOMEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL



"Any chance you get to represent your country, you do it," Maryland's Marissa Coleman said. The rising junior forward won a gold medal with the U19 team in the 2005 FIBA World Championship and International Sports Festival. — AP

## Coleman, McCoughtry join patriotic ranks

### Local players to compete for U.S. at Pan American Games

By Ron Snyder  
Examiner Staff Writer

After watching two of her University of Maryland basketball teammates win a gold medal last weekend, Marissa Coleman wants to claim one.

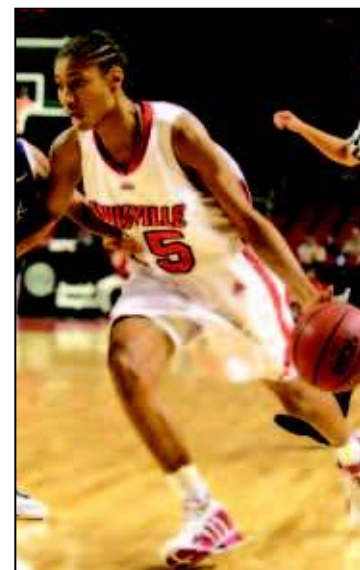
Coleman, along with Angel McCoughtry, a Baltimore native who now plays for the University of Louisville, are the latest players with area ties to represent the United States in an international competition. The duo will join the rest of the country's 12-member national team that will travel to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to compete in the Pan American Games' tournament July 20-24.

The team hopes to match the success of the United States' under-21 team, which won the gold medal in the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) U21 World Championships in Moscow on Sunday. That team included Maryland players Crystal Langhorne and Laura Harper.

Coleman and McCoughtry will look to improve the national's team silver medal-winning performance at the 2003 Pan American Games, which are held every year before the Summer Olympics.

"Any chance you get to represent your country, you do it," said Coleman, a rising junior forward at Maryland who won a gold medal with the U19 team in the 2005 FIBA World Championship and International Sports Festival. "I talked with Crystal every day she was in Russia and she told me what to expect. They set the bar high for us."

McCoughtry, a former standout at St. Frances High, has quickly be-



Louisville's Angel McCoughtry, a Baltimore native, joins Coleman on the American team. McCoughtry averaged 21.5 points and 10.3 rebounds last season for the Cardinals. — AP

come one of the top college players in the country after the forward averaged 21.5 points and 10.3 rebounds for Louisville last season.

McCoughtry said competing for a spot on the U.S. team was an educational experience, as she learned about the different rules and strategies of the international game.

"The preparation for a tournament like this is so different than in college," said McCoughtry, a rising junior. "You don't know about who you are playing and there are so many different styles you can see from teams from around the world."

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**ONLINE TODAY:** Do you think the U.S. Women's basketball team will win the championship at the Pan American Games?