

### JT's Thoughts on the Olympics

This is my first time being at home during the Summer Olympics since 1988. The last three Olympics I have been in the Village, at the Olympic Pool, or on buses somewhere in between. It is a very different perspective. Here are some of my thoughts from the last couple days.

### USA Goes for Bronze Medal on Thursday

As I'm sure you are aware, our Olympic water polo team lost a heartbreaker to Italy on Tuesday. The Italians scored with 2.8 seconds remaining to pull off a 6-5 victory and stun our defending World Champions. We had led the game 4-2 going in to the 4th quarter, but we let it slip away. Our team is playing extremely well, in spite of having to spend much of each game playing 5on6.

So now the big challenge is to see if we can come back from the bitter disappointment of losing in the semifinals to beat Australia in the 3rd place game. That game will be a rematch of the Sydney gold medal game.

### True Olympians

Those of you who have been watching the Olympics have seen repeatedly the importance of rebounding from setbacks and of maintaining one's focus in the face of great adversity. You saw Paul Hamm, our gymnast who overcame falling onto the judges in his vault to win the men's all-around. Four nights later, in the judging fiasco involving Russia's Alexei Nemov, Hamm waited ten minutes while Nemov's scores were changed and the crowd jeered. Then he promptly got up and pulled off a silver medal high bar routine amid the ongoing chaos. And you saw Carly Patterson, who came back from the disappointment of a 2nd place finish in the team finals to win the all-around title.

The Olympics are full of ups and downs, sometimes over the course of a few minutes. In the case of water polo, it is a longer roller coaster ride. The pressure is unbelievably intense, even within the insulated confines of the Olympic Village, where the US polo players get plenty of feedback via email, newspaper, television (in the Village, you have in your apartment or house a closed circuit tv with over 50 channels, each dedicated to a specific venue, plus all the other sports and news channels you'd normally get on that city's cable or satellite system), and other competitors and teams. There is plenty of time to contemplate what went wrong and how your next chance to atone for an Olympic loss will not come for four agonizingly long years. It is excruciating. And it is against this backdrop that our team must gather itself and come out to beat Australia.

True Olympians, people who emulate the icons of Olympic legend, like Paul Hamm, Carly Patterson and Hicham El-Guerrouj (the incredibly resilient Moroccan 1500 runner who, as the favorite in Atlanta fell on the last lap and in Sydney was passed in the last few steps of the race, came back and won last night's 1500, even after having lost his lead in the final 100 meters), know how to recover from adversity and maintain their composure and focus in the most stressful circumstances. I know all of the players on our women's water polo team, and I know that they are determined, resilient athletes. So I am predicting that we will win the bronze medal tomorrow, in spite of their great

disappointment about yesterday's loss. You will see that Brenda Villa, Jackie Frank, Robin Beauregard and the rest of the team are true Olympians.

### Olympic Imposters

On the other side of the coin, there is the US men's basketball team. While they have learned many valuable lessons at these Games, and it appears they may be getting their act together just in time to save themselves, this team is far from being a team. What are their problems?

1. Great individuals don't necessarily make great teams- We have a ton of talent on our "Dream Team," but they have developed in the NBA an attitude of entitlement and "every man for himself." Many are focused on making money, not really playing great team basketball. At the Olympics, we are seeing great teams coming through and winning. Yao Ming, who shows no emotion while playing in the NBA, was overcome with excitement and tears when his China team made the quarterfinals. And most telling of all, China's coach, Del Harris, who has won all kinds of championships in years of coaching in the US, called that victory "the greatest win of my life."!!!

--In our club, we emphasize team play. We teach tactics that encourage and even require contributions from everyone in the water. Playing team water polo makes us harder to beat and makes it more rewarding for everyone.

2. The Dream Team only practiced together for two weeks. If you just show up and play, you will under-achieve. A great team on paper is not necessarily a great team in the competitive arena. In order to fulfill a team's potential, the team must practice a system of play. That takes time, and there are no shortcuts.

--This is why we require workout attendance in order to compete. Our club plays a system, which means we end up playing like a team, like our Olympic WOMEN'S basketball team. We only require you to come to 75% of our workouts, but many of you come to 100% of workouts, making you and our teams even stronger.

3. They don't understand what's going on! The NBA players don't know how the international game is played, and they have been slow to listen to their coaches (who unfortunately know less about it than the opposing coaches). The other teams play solid, fundamental basketball and they use tactics that are best suited to the style of game they are playing in the Olympics.

--At Stanford Water Polo, we have the best coaches. And we teach solid, fundamental water polo, and we use tactics that are logical and cutting edge. That is why we perform better than teams that have more talent.

### JT's Viewing Guide

So watch the US women's water polo team and the US women's basketball team. You will see True Olympians playing as a team. And you will see athletes who overcome setbacks and maintain their focus in the face of difficult times. We can't know how their games will come out (although I'm pretty confident that our polo team will win tomorrow). And we don't want to know the outcomes in advance- that takes the fun out

of it. But I do know that those two teams will make us proud and will play like True Olympians.

I also recommend checking out team handball. If you've never seen it, picture water polo played on a gym floor. It is high scoring, fast paced, has power plays and great shooting. You will also notice that most of the top teams are also strong in water polo. The gold medal games are this weekend.

But for me the most meaningful part of the Olympics is the Closing Ceremony. For athletes, coaches, Olympic volunteers and organizers, people who have dedicated themselves for four years to make it all happen, the Closing Ceremony is a powerful and important event. Watch the faces of those who are interviewed and you will sense the great satisfaction felt by those who chase a dream and push themselves to the limit in their chosen discipline. And you will see people starting to dream about what is possible in the future.

After the Olympics- The Fall Polo Season

We look forward to seeing you all this fall, whether you play for one of the 16 high school teams from which we have players or play with our age group program. It's all right around the corner.

I hope you are enjoying getting back into the swing of life during the school year.

Regards,

JT