

2008 Bank of America Hometown Hopefuls™



Jennie Finch, Phoenix, AZ — Softball

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Tony Azevedo, Long Beach, CA — Water Polo

Known in the American water polo circuit as “The Savior,” Tony Azevedo has been recognized as one of the best American water polo players in recent history. Coached by his father and part of the Azevedo water polo family dynasty, Tony captured the spotlight at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, scoring a career-best 15 goals, out-shining opponents from all over the world. Tony’s mom, feeling left out as the only family member not competing in the sport, started a mom’s-only league in Long Beach, California and was last year’s leading scorer.



Howard Bach, San Francisco, CA — Badminton

Coming off of his 2005 World Championship victory and recent silver medal performance at the 2007 Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Howard Bach lives the “American Dream.” Born in Vietnam and raised in San Francisco, Howard learned the sport of badminton from his father and honed his skills at his local YMCA. Howard’s dreams came true in 2004 when he earned the chance to represent the USA at the Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, giving a strong performance in the men’s doubles competition. In addition to competing, Howard is a USA Badminton junior development coach, working with America’s next generation of players.



Shannon Boxx, Redondo Beach, CA — Soccer

Despite four knee surgeries and being the first uncapped player ever named to a women’s World Cup team, Shannon has excelled on the international soccer circuit, becoming the first U.S. player to have scored a goal in each of her first three international games. Shannon rejoins the U.S. National team this year with a medal in mind to match her sister Gillian’s gold medal in softball during the Atlanta 1996 Games.



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Jennie Finch, Phoenix, AZ — Softball

Jennie Finch, one of the biggest names in softball, has dominated the sport's landscape with accomplishments including several NCAA titles and the coveted gold medal at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. During the Games, Jennie struck out 13 batters and shutout her opponents across an impressive eight innings of work. Currently the starting pitcher for the Chicago Bandits, Jennie is also a correspondent on MLB's "This Week in Baseball," and spends her off-season teaching softball techniques at youth clinics across the country. She and her husband, Arizona Diamondbacks minor league pitcher Casey Daigle, are new parents to son, Ace.



Brett Heyl, Charlotte, NC — Kayak

A life-long athlete, Brett Heyl has always been devoted to the sport of white-water kayaking. With a U.S. Junior National Championship under his belt at the young age of 13, Brett blew away the competition, setting the stage to dominate the international field. After turning down a college scholarship to train in the challenging waters of Slovenia, Brett finished 8th at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and is currently training at the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, NC and has his sights set on a medal performance in Beijing.



Sada Jacobson, Dunwoody, GA — Fencing

All eyes are on Sada Jacobson and her saber during her journey to the Beijing Olympic Games to add gold to her bronze medal performance in Athens. Sada, the first U.S. woman and second U.S. fencer to ever rank No. 1 in the world hails from a long family line of fencers as her father was a member of the 1974 U.S. Olympic Team for Men's Saber as well as her two sisters who also fence competitively. Sada and her younger sister Emily have been compared to Tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams, dominating their competition in every international tournament they enter.



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Cullen Jones, New Brunswick, NJ — Swimming

A rising star on the international swimming circuit and influential role model, Cullen Jones has set the standard for next year's Olympic Games as the first African-American swimmer to break a long-course world record. Cullen has already demonstrated his ability as part of the U.S. Men's relay breaking world records in 2006 and winning gold in 2007 at the World Aquatics Championships. After capturing his first U.S. National title, Cullen has been using his athletic talent as a platform to promote diversity in the sport of swimming. Cullen is also a supporter of the Ronald Jones Foundation, a cancer research foundation named in honor of his late father who died from lung cancer when he was 16.



Tara Kirk, Bremerton, WA — Swimming

Tara Kirk has had many accomplishments during her career both in and out of the pool. Collegiate scholar, superior athlete, world record holder, and 4x100m medley relay silver medalist during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games are just a few. With Olympic glory in mind, Tara will expect to have a special cheering section at the pool in Beijing as several of her family members currently live in China and plan to reunite with the stateside Kirk family. Tara is very active with international children's charities and hopes to start a career with the World Health Organization.



Ogonna Nnamani, Normal, IL — Volleyball

Despite being one of the youngest players on her team, Ogonna had a breakout performance at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, showing her teammates and the international volleyball world that she had arrived as the new powerhouse for Team USA. Her incredible height and power often require up to three players to block her and the world will be watching to see what she may do for the U.S. in Beijing. Ogonna and her family have become local celebrities in their hometown of Normal, IL having met President Bush and having been honored with "Ogonna Nnamani Day," a state-wide celebration to recognize her athletic achievements.



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Aaron Peirsol, Irvine, CA — Swimming

California native, Aaron Peirsol gained international fame in 2004 by winning three Olympic gold medals and sweeping the backstroke races as only the fifth male in history to do so at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Even at the age of 15, Aaron was making headlines as the youngest American in history to break the two-minute mark in the 200m backstroke. Aaron is an energetic ambassador and spokesperson for several environmental conservation organizations.



Hayley Peirsol, Irvine, CA — Swimming

As one of America's most promising swim stars and younger sister of three-time U.S. Olympic gold medal winner Aaron Peirsol, Hayley Peirsol stands to sweep the competition heading into next year's Beijing Games. One of only three women in history to break the 16 minute mark in the 1500m freestyle, Hayley has been said to be on pace with the career of world record holder, Janet Evans. Should Aaron and Hayley take home medals in Beijing, they will be the first brother-sister duo to have ever medaled together in a single Olympic Games. Hayley recently graduated from Auburn University and has aspirations to be on the Food Network when she is done competitively swimming.



Lauryn Williams, Miami, FL — Track & Field

Pittsburgh-native Lauryn Williams has earned a reputation as one of the fastest women in the world of Track & Field and the new face in the sport. After helping to raise over \$20,000 to send her ailing father to Athens to watch her compete, Lauryn captured the hearts of fans across the country with her compelling story. Excelling in both academics and athletics, Lauryn graduated from University of Miami in 3 ½ years and captured a silver medal during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. She continues to be successful on the international circuit as the Beijing Games approach.

