

Jessica Hardy: In Her Own Words

BY JASON MARSTELLER

RIGHT » When asked if she watched any of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and, specifically, the events she had qualified for, Hardy answered that she purposefully did not watch any of her races: "I don't think there's a single person in the world strong enough to watch people winning Olympic medals who you beat the month before."

While the world watched Michael Phelps make history at last summer's Beijing Olympics, another American swimmer was at home dealing with the powerful emotions of shattered dreams.

That swimmer, Jessica Hardy, tested positive for the banned stimulant, clenbuterol, while qualifying for the U.S. Olympic team at the American Trials in July 2008. The positive test led to a two-year suspension from the sport and dismissal from the U.S. Olympic team heading to Beijing.

After bowing out of the appeals process to allow the U.S. team to focus on the Olympics, Hardy spent the next 10 months fighting to prove her innocence. The initial steps of that vindication came in May 2009 when the American Arbitration Association reduced her suspension to one year, citing that her positive sample came from a contaminated supplement. FINA and WADA both appealed the reduction, although FINA has since rescinded its appeal.

Meanwhile, Hardy is appealing the IOC Rule 45 that will prohibit her from competing at the 2012 London Olympics should she qualify. The new addition to the rule—which went into place just days before Hardy's positive test—states that anyone serving more than a six-month ban for doping will automatically be ruled ineligible for the Olympic Games following the end of that suspension.

AdvoCare—the supplement company at issue—and Hardy still have counter lawsuits pending to decide legally whether Hardy's positive tests came from AdvoCare's supplements.

While the end result of this legal chess match is still to come, the AAA ruling has helped Hardy clear

her name to some point within the swimming community.

After a request by *Swimming World Magazine*, Hardy agreed to her first extended interview since news broke regarding her suspension reduction. Following are Hardy's thoughts about one of the most intense emotional experiences anyone might face:

[PHOTO BY PETER H. BICK]



On the experience of finding out about the positive “A” sample test:

I found out through a phone call while I was in (U.S. National Team Managing Director) Lindsay Mintenko’s room. I didn’t really believe it at first. I knew that there was no way I could have tested positive. I know I keep saying that, but I knew there was nothing I took—something else must have happened...someone must have made a mistake...maybe I inhaled a mist on deck or something? I just started thinking about all the possible ways it could have happened. I wasn’t upset at first—because I didn’t believe it.

When I started talking to the USOC Athlete Ombudsman, it finally hit me that it was real. We started talking about opening the “B” sample and about getting a lawyer. It hit me then that it was a real problem. I kind of exploded into tears.

On her training level at the 2008 U.S. Olympic Training Camp:

I was actually training the best I have ever trained in my entire life. I actually broke the world record in the 50 (meter) breast at the end of practice while wearing a training suit. I went 30.00. I was on pace for my goal times—times that are still my goal times right now. I was ready for the best meet of my life, and I was feeling so excited, confident and happy.

On the process after the positive test came through:

A lot of it is a blur to me. When I deal with a crisis, I tend to space out and bury myself mentally. I don’t really remember much of what happened. I was told to call USADA’s attorney first. But when I called him, he reminded me that he was the prosecuting attorney, and said that everything I said in the phone call could be held against me.

At this point, I was bursting out crying. I was referred to the USOC Athlete Ombudsman, and he was fabulous. He guided me through what I needed to do. He also told me the best attorney to go to. I had assumed my stepdad (Bill Robinson) could be my attorney, but this wasn’t his type of case. So I had him start making phone calls, too.

I also talked to Mark Schubert immediately. He tried to stay calm, and was really helpful in trying to find out what to do. He kept me training for a few days because we still thought there could have been a mistake. But I was crying hysterically 24/7 at this point.

Everyone on the team thought someone died in my family. Everyone was just respecting my space because I told them I didn’t want to talk about it. I would go to practice and cry in my goggles. It was just so much mass confusion.

The “B” sample had to be opened and tested. When we got the news about the positive “B” sample test, I went back to Los Angeles to meet with my attorneys to start fighting the test through arbitration.

On the media attention following the positive test:

It was also a really huge blur to me. I had tons of phone calls, and reporters were pounding on our door all day and night. People were surrounding my house, and I had lots of text messages. Cameras were

also trying to shoot through the windows of our house. My sister, Amanda, was home alone when it first hit the news. She called my mom, Denise, crying hysterically because people were looking in the windows when she was doing her homework.

On her positive sample not being tested as quickly as the other samples from U.S. Olympic Trials due to a coding error:

I don’t have that big of a problem with it. It ended up being a contaminated supplement, and I wouldn’t have gone to Beijing anyway. I know they did not intentionally delay that result. I know that they are doing everything they can, not to have the same problems again. I just don’t want to see it happen again to anyone else.

On the intensity of the U.S. Olympic Training Camp:

It was a really weird situation. We had to work so hard again right after Trials. It was immediately back to strenuous practices. The people who make the team are the most competitive people ever. It’s a really stressful situation for someone on his or her first team.

I was in a group with just Dara (Torres), and we were pushing each other really hard. It was kind of a trip, and difficult to adjust to at first. After a week-and-a-half, I got used to it and enjoyed it a lot more.

It was also weird without my personal coach (USC’s Dave Salo) there, so Mark Schubert was my coach. I roomed with (Rebecca) Soni, so it was more like home since we already train together. It was also fun because we got massages every day.

We really just swam and ate and slept. We didn’t have much time to do anything else. When I am at home, I can go to a movie and see a friend. But there, we had no cars, so it felt a bit more claustrophobic than I am used to.

On Dara Torres’ coach, Michael Lohberg, being diagnosed with life-threatening aplastic anemia during the camp:

Dara found out about her coach’s illness the day I found out about my (“A” sample) test. We were both crying hysterically under our goggles during training that day. She told me why she was crying, and I hugged her. But I couldn’t tell her why I was crying. I just told her I had a personal emergency. Schubert coached us

RIGHT » Hardy commented that while she was training at the 2008 U.S. Olympic Training Camp, she was actually training the best she had ever trained in her entire life: “I was ready for the best meet of my life, and I was feeling so excited, confident and happy.”

[PHOTO BY PETER H. BICK]



PICTURED At the 2007 World Championships in Melbourne, Jessica Hardy captured the gold medal in the 50 meter breaststroke. A little over a year later at the U.S. Olympic Trials, she tested positive for the banned stimulant, clenbuterol, and was dismissed from the U.S. Olympic team.

that day, and he probably had the toughest time ever.

On having to deal with being labeled a doper the rest of her career:

That is something I am going to block out of my head. I am not a doper. I did not dope. I took supplements. If anyone had told me you cannot take supplements, I would not have. I was told I was taking supplements at my own risk. I was assured over and over by a lot of people that the supplement I was taking was 100 percent clean, so I took it.

I know there will be people who want to see the glass half-empty and attack me and never be on my side. They want to be negative. I know that is going to happen. I am not going to let them into my life or let their opinions get into my head. They aren't people who I need to associate myself with, but there are always going to be people like that. I will not pay attention to it because I know the truth.

On FINA and WADA appealing her suspension reduction:

(Editor's Note: this interview took place the day that news came out that FINA and WADA appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport to return Hardy's previously reduced suspension to two years. Although FINA has since rescinded its appeal, WADA continues to push for Hardy's suspension to return to two years.)

I am still training, and still free to compete on Aug. 1. Within the next six months, this will all be over. I am still approaching my next competition as I was yesterday. I still haven't seen what their appeal is about. Until that decision is done, the American Arbitration Association's decision is still valid, as far as I know.

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PASSAGES

The swimming community in the United States has been rocked over the past two months with the passing of several coaching greats. On the heels of **Richard Quick** losing his battle with brain cancer in June (see page 7), two more coaches passed away the first part of July.

On July 6, **Ralph "Flip" Darr** passed away from a massive heart attack. Darr was a national-level coach for more than 25 years with California-based teams such as Phillips 66, Huntington Beach Aquatics and Irvine Novas.

Along with Hall of Fame coach **Don Gambril**, Darr played a significant part in developing **Gary Hall Sr., Shirley Babashoff, Steve Furniss, Valerie Lee, Mike O'Brien, Dan Jorgensen** and **John Mykkannen**. Their efforts led to swimmers earning 16 world records, eight Olympic medals, nine World Championship medals, three Pan American Games medals and 31 U.S. Swimming national titles. Darr also placed swimmers on

the 1968, '72, '76 and '84 Olympic teams, and served as the head U.S. coach for the 1975 World Championship women's team.

Four days later, U.S. Paralympic coach **Jimi Flowers** died during a rock climbing accident in Aspen, Colo. Flowers had a huge impact on the Paralympic community after serving as USA Swimming's national team director from 1989-93. Flowers served both USA Swimming (Colorado Springs, Colo.) and Auburn University (Auburn, Ala.) in whatever capacity each needed at varying times of his career.

Recently, however, Flowers found a new calling within U.S. Paralympics. Under his tutelage, U.S. Paralympic swimmers have set numerous world records, and **Jessica Long** became the first Paralympian to receive the AAU's Sullivan Award as the nation's outstanding amateur athlete in 2007.



AMANDA REASON BREAKS WORLD RECORD

Canada's **Amanda Reason** broke the world record in the women's 50 meter breast on the opening

On the type of training she has done to keep in shape during her suspension:

I trained in the water three times a week and did dryland on my own almost every other day. Besides taking time off during the holidays and during the Olympics, I really never got out of shape. I trained pretty well throughout the year, and stayed pretty close to the times I was holding in practice in 2008 despite only being in the water three times a week.

On whether she watched the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and, specifically, the events she had qualified for:

I did my best to avoid watching any of the swimming at the Games. I was kind of forced to watch at some restaurants and the hotel lobby while I was on "vacation" with my family in Aruba. It didn't really serve the purpose of a vacation, but I went.

I did watch my boyfriend (Swiss swimmer Dominik Meichtry) swim most of his events—especially his 200 free in which he beat Phelps in a prelim. He got sixth overall. I also watched beach volleyball, water polo and track events because I love watching sports in general.

But I purposefully didn't watch a single one of my races. I don't think there's a single person in the world strong enough to watch people winning Olympic medals who you beat the month before.

On what she would have done differently this past year if she could do it again:

Besides simply never starting to take supplements, I don't think there is anything specific I would have changed—although, I would have maybe started going to therapy sooner to finding out about my positive test. I only started doing so in the past two

months. It has helped me tremendously, and I think that might have made my experiences more tolerable.


On having supportive people in her life:

I was lucky as I had a couple of close friends who were really supportive during the time. In a state of crisis—like if a family member passes—there are usually two ways people approach you. There are people who are afraid to talk about it, (so they) ignore it. And there are people who approach it head-on and tell you that they believe in you.

The people who approached it head-on really helped me a lot. I had just lost my confidence, my state of reality and sense of truth. Having people there saying that they believed in me was the nicest thing they could have done. They saved my life—because they really did. ♦

PICTURED *Hardy, who had set the American record in the 100 meter breast in 2005 with a time of 1:06.20, was the top qualifier at the 2008 U.S. Olympic Trials with a time of 1:06.87. Her split of 30.53 at the 50 was an American record.*

Premium online members click here to read more of Jessica Hardy's interview at www.SwimmingWorldMagazine.com. While online, check out Swimming World's "The Morning Show" (May 14, 2009) for a video interview with Hardy. (To learn more about becoming a premium member, see the ad on page 26 in this magazine.)




night of Canada's World Championship Trials, July 8, in Montreal, racing to a 30.23 to break **Jade Edmestone's** (Australia) world mark of 30.31.

Reason became the only Canadian at the time with a world record in the long course meter books. The Canadians were so excited about the swim that the entire field swam over to Reason to offer congratulations before exiting the pool.

WESTERN ILLINOIS SWIMMING AND DIVING PROGRAM REINSTATED

The **Western Illinois** Leatherneck Swimming and Diving program was reinstated, June 29, after the school had announced at the beginning of the month that its men's and women's swimming and diving programs were being cut.

Greg Naumann has since been named head coach of the newly reformed program. Naumann spent the previous year at Truman State as an assistant after having served time as both a swimmer and coach for the Leathernecks earlier in his career.



PHILADELPHIA SWIM CLUB IN HOT WATER AFTER ALLEGED DISCRIMINATION

The **Valley Swim Club** of Montgomery County in Philadelphia came under some heavy fire from the swimming community during the beginning of July after allegedly discriminating against 65 African-American and Hispanic swimmers.

The club had made arrangements with Creative Steps Inc., a day camp based in northeast Philadelphia, for its campers to use the pool once a week for a month. The campers, ranging from kindergarten to seventh grade, claimed to have heard racial remarks due to their ethnicity. Shortly after the incidents, Valley Swim Club issued a refund to Creative Steps and stopped the campers from using the pool.

The alleged discrimination drew immediate responses from Olympic gold medalist **Cullen Jones** and USA Swimming executive director **Chuck Wielgus**, among various others in the swimming community, condemning the actions by the swim team. ♦