

## BASKETBALL

# Taurasi not slowing down, aims for sixth gold medal

PHOENIX (AP) — Diana Taurasi joked after the Tokyo Olympics that she would see everyone in Paris. The 42-year-old guard turned the joke into reality; she'll be playing in a record sixth Olympic Games when the U.S. women's basketball team goes for its eighth consecutive gold medal later this month.

"Why not? I say this all the time, if I sign up to play, I sign up to play," she said. "I don't love how my last Olympics went personally. I think as a team we still have a lot to prove. I love playing USA Basketball. You play with the best in the world. Basketball is a team sport and if you have the opportunity to play with the best in the world, I'll always sign up."

Taurasi has been a mainstay on the Olympic women's team since graduating from UConn in 2004 and leading the Huskies to three consecutive NCAA championships. The WNBA's all-time scoring leader with more than 10,000 points, Taurasi is still playing at a high level. The Phoenix Mercury All-Star is averaging 16.1 points and 4.8 rebounds in her 20th season in the WNBA.

"No one has done it more than her. There's no substitute for that level of experience," U.S. coach Cheryl Reeve said.

Taurasi is the fourth-leading scorer in Olympic history with 414 points. She's 74 points behind her former teammate Lisa Leslie for the top spot on the American list. She already is the all-time leader in games played with 38.

Her teammates respect her knowledge and insight as there's very little she hasn't seen during her time playing on the international stage.

"She's seen it all," U.S. teammate Breanna Stewart said. "She knows exactly what to say before the coaches even come into the locker room."

Besides winning five gold medals, Taurasi's favorite Olympic memory was the opening ceremonies at her first one in Athens in 2004.

"The whole world is watching this and when they call out all the countries and the U.S. lines up, there's this togetherness you don't get very often in sports," she said. "Every single walk of life, every discipline in sports is all in one place. It's pretty special. That moment is special at every Olympics."

So is winning. Taurasi doesn't know what it's like to lose at the Olympics.

The U.S. has never lost an Olympic game that Taurasi's competed in, going 38-0 during that stretch. That streak dates back even further. The last loss by the Americans was in the 1992 Barcelona Games.

Taurasi said winning is ingrained in the culture of USA Basketball.

"You always have to wait your turn," she said. "In '04 I was getting Lisa (Leslie) and Dawn (Staley) donuts. Learning the ropes. ... I tried to soak up all the knowledge I could. Then as I progressed in my career I got more responsibility. I became one of the leaders. I think that's what USA B does so great. It's not forced, it just happens which makes it even better."

Taurasi smiled when asked about the 2028 Olympics, which will be played in her hometown of Los Angeles. As much as she would love to play in front of her home fans, she'll be 46 at that point.

"I'm just as addicted to basketball right now as I was when I was 15 playing in my driveway. I have the same ambitions, the same passion, the same love for it," she said. "I show up every single day in Phoenix at the practice facility at 7:30 a.m. ready to go. That's how I treat it."

"However, when it's done, it's done."

If this will be Taurasi's last Olympics, as coach Reeve says, no basketball player has done it more — or better — than Taurasi.

## MIDLANDS COLLEGE COACH OF THE YEAR

# Concordia coaches return home, build powerhouse

GENE SCHINZEL  
World-Herald Staff Writer

Ben and Angie Boldt's volleyball journey has taken them to more than a handful of major programs.

There were two seasons at Alabama, followed by five years at Iowa, then one-year stints at Arkansas and Iowa Western. Angie was coach for two years at Division III's Hendrix College in Arkansas while Ben was her assistant.

But it all started when they were at the University of Nebraska working for coach John Cook. When the Huskers won the 2006 national title, Ben was a student coach and manager. Angie was a student assistant for volleyball operations.

"Working with Nebraska certainly helped us know what to teach and what our philosophies are," Ben said. "(Over the years) we've had a touch of everything and we're certainly grateful for all the people who have led us and mentored us along the way."

But wherever in the country they were coaching, Ben said it always felt like when they would return to Nebraska. Ben graduated from Norris High School and his dad coached basketball, while Angie is from the central Nebraska town of St. Paul.

And ever since Ben was hired as coach and Angie as assistant at Concordia, they have been at home, building a perennial powerhouse program in one of the deepest volleyball conferences in the NAIA.

Cook recommended the Boldts when Concordia was filling its vacancy in December 2017. Concordia was coming off a 9-19 season and had losing seasons in seven of its previous 10.

But Concordia went 15-12 in their first season in 2018. The Bulldogs have gone on to reach the last five NCAA tournaments and compiled a 50-10 record the past two seasons.

Concordia reached some benchmarks in 2023. The Bulldogs won their first 17 matches and rose to No. 1 in the NAIA national rankings for the first time — Concordia never had



BEN MEYER, CONCORDIA ATHLETICS

Ben Boldt returned to Nebraska to coach Concordia after stops around the country. Since 2017, he and his wife, assistant coach Angie Boldt, have built an NAIA contender.

been higher than fourth in a poll prior to last season. And playing in a conference that had five teams in the top 16 in the NAIA's final poll, Concordia won a share of the GPAC regular-season title for the first time since 2000. The Bulldogs finished with the highest single-season winning percentage (.862) in program history and picked up a program-best 14 conference wins.

"(The GPAC title) is an annual goal that we have. We lean a lot into our core values and how we approach everyday," said Ben Boldt, who is The World-Herald's Midlands college coach of the year for 2023-24. "The journey was awesome. It's a grind, the GPAC conference. We call it the Big Ten of the NAIA, so it's definitely an accomplishment."

Ben said they try to focus on the process and journey more than results.

"I remember reading a book, 'The Score Takes Care of Itself'

by Bill Walsh," said Ben, referring to the former San Francisco 49ers Super Bowl-winning coach. "I think when you focus on the right things, focus on building foundational, relational things, the score ends up taking care of itself. Our players have done an awesome job buying into that."

Concordia has had 12 NAIA All-Americans — five of them have been since 2019. The Bulldogs had three All-Americans last season with outside hitter Camryn Opfer, middle blocker Gabi Nordaker and setter Bree Burtwistle. Burtwistle became the first player in program history to be named a first-team All-American as Concordia led the NAIA in kills per set (14.59) and ranked sixth in hitting percentage (.257).

Concordia will be led this season by Nordaker, a Millard West graduate who is returning for a fifth season. Nordaker is a two-time NAIA All-American who has 1,160 career kills. She also helped the Bulldogs reach the NAIA tour-

nament quarterfinals in 2020 and 2021, which is the furthest they've ever advanced.

Also this spring, Concordia added a pair of outside hitter transfers in Masa Scheierman from South Dakota State and Ella Walters from Washburn. Scheierman started 10 matches for the Jackrabbits last season.

"We're definitely going to look different," Boldt said. "I still think our goals aren't going to change, we're going to do things at a high level. I'm excited for this year just from the standpoint of what we can be."

Ben and Angie were married in 2009 and have two children as son Brady is 8 and daughter Addison is 6. It's a family that's involved with volleyball, and Ben said it doesn't feel like work when they head to the gym.

"I think that Angie and I have gone through our careers and we've built off the foundation of everyone we've learned from," Ben said. "It's been an awesome journey for us."

## Olympics

From C1

foreshadowed the versatility in Travis' game. A trait that would bring him full circle, and all the way to the Olympics in Paris to represent the U.S. 3x3 team.

"I still play with that same type of chip on my shoulder at age 31," Travis said. "It's always been there for me from middle school up until now."

Travis had success playing 5-on-5 basketball, he continued his career at Midland University before finishing at Florida Southern. He was set to return to Australia for his third pro season when COVID-19 hit in 2020 and canceled sports worldwide.

Before that, Travis had played smaller 3-on-3 tournaments. Team USA manager Michael Wranovics had even come to Omaha to start a team.

When basketball picked up again after the pandemic, Travis had a decision to make. Wranovics told him that if he kept at 3-on-3, he could move up the ranks and have a chance to play on the FIBA World Tour. Possibly the Olympics.

"If you keep doing what you're doing and the team does well," Wranovics said, "you'll be in the spotlight, and then Team USA will have no choice."

### 'Have it or you don't'

Wranovics thought Travis was one of the best 3-on-3 players he ever saw.

It's a grueling, fast-paced game that requires players to be well rounded, and Wranovics said the current assistant basketball coach at Omaha Westside brings talent on both ends of the floor. He also plays with a high IQ and passion.

"Some of these qualities can't really be coached," Wranovics said.



USA BASKETBALL

Dylan Travis played some 3-on-3 basketball as a kid, then again after college. But he didn't think the sport would be his ticket to the Olympics — until it was. "He's probably the best 3-on-3 player in America not named Jimmer (Fredette)," Team USA manager Michael Wranovics said.

"You either have it or you don't. Dylan has it."

The coach added: "He's probably the best 3-on-3 player in America not named Jimmer (Fredette), the 2011 national player of the year at BYU."

But Wranovics had to work to convince Travis to take sport more seriously. The coach noted how there were opportunities to play in the Olympics and around the world, and still start a career off the court. It didn't require a nine-month commitment overseas, like 5-on-5.

"I never really believed him," Travis said. "But year by year, things kept getting better for me and to where I'm at now, where I've made the national team three or four times now."

After playing for the U.S. in the 2022 FIBA 3x3 Americup and 2023 FIBA 3x3 World Cup, he joins Fre-

dette, Canyon Barry and Kareem Maddox on the Olympic team in Paris.

Wearing USA across his chest and representing his country has been a surreal feeling that finally hit him last October, when he played for the third time in the Pan American Games. That event also happens every four years and starts with an opening ceremony in front of 100,000 people.

"I just remember that moment," he said, "and it just didn't even seem real."

Travis helped the Americans take home gold in that tournament, too.

### Long road traveled

The Olympics was always the goal, but he didn't know last year if he would make it. Travis knew he wanted that feeling again. The one that rushed over him during the Pa-

just spend time among the crowd. Inside the gym, the 36-year-old boxer with a record of 40-0 spoke with media, facing plenty questions about his future but focusing on the present.

"My mind is crystal clear on one thing and that's Israel Madrimov," he said. "Aug. 3 is the only fight that's in the back of my mind and in the front of my mind, side of my mind."

He said his reason for moving up from fighting at 147 pounds to 154 was getting older and his body growing. Getting to 147 was "tough," and he doesn't feel he has anything left to prove in that class.

Since he hasn't fought in this division before, Crawford said he doesn't know how his body will feel in the match and what challenges he will face. Madrimov, on the other hand, has spent his entire professional career in the division. He'll enter his defense against Crawford with an undefeated 10-0-1 record. The Omaha understands the challenge ahead of him.

"Every fight could be my toughest fight," he said. "I don't know until I step foot in the ring. Israel is definitely a tough opponent. We're definitely not taking him lightly, we never took any shortcuts on

nAm Games.

Now that the Paris Olympics are nearly here, he is trying to stay in the moment.

"I pinch myself every time I get to the airport and we get to some exotic place of the world," Travis said. "I try to remind myself that this isn't normal, and a younger version of me would be ecstatic that I'm doing this."

Doing this includes playing in Prague at a castle and playing in front of a parliament building in Vienna.

While the 3-on-3 game in the U.S. has not caught up to the popularity it reached in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, Travis has still seen recent growth. Team USA even played at halftime of the men's Final Four in front of 74,720.

"It's like baby steps to getting the door open in America to 3-on-3 basketball," Travis said.

Travis and Co. open Olympic play July 30 against Serbia. Pool play continues with games against Poland on July 31, two games Aug. 1 against Lithuania and Latvia, two more games Aug. 2 against France and China before the finale Aug. 4 against the Netherlands.

Travis noted that his career turn and the opportunity to play in the Games is a testament to his hard work and faith.

"I remember in eighth grade, in a poem for English class," Travis said, "I put on there that I wanted to play pro basketball and travel the world."

He accomplished that with 5-on-5 basketball, but even more so in 3-on-3.

"Just feels out of body at times," Travis said. "You try your best to stay grounded and stay humble and healthy. Most of all, and hopefully, you'll win a gold medal."

And gold would be a pretty good consolation for missing out on that \$20 gift card.

## Boxing

bout against Errol Spence Jr. in July 2023. This time, he'll move up a weight class and take on WBA super welterweight title-holder Israel Madrimov in Los Angeles.

Saturday, Crawford spent time taking pictures and signing autographs for fans. Social media star Logan Paul also made a short appearance, mainly promoting his company Prime Hydration. Crawford signed with Prime last year.

Crawford didn't take to the microphone at the event, opting to

this fight."

Crawford has had an eventful week, sparring with retired undefeated boxer Andre Ward and making an appearance at WWE SmackDown on Friday. He called the latter a "dream come true" as a fan since childhood.

Now two weeks out from his fight, he took time with his home community.

"I love to see the community come together for a positive event and show they support, come out here and just have fun, just mingle with other kids and other people," Crawford said. "That's what it's all about at the end of the day."