

Pure Gold

Jessica waited on the side of the pool. Her heart was beating quickly as she imagined the race in her mind. She was ready.

“On your mark, get set, go!” As the buzzer sounded, Jessica dove in. She swam to victory and, at only twelve years old, qualified for the Paralympic Games.

Jessica Long didn’t set out to break records. She simply wanted to swim. Born with fibular hemimelia, Jessica’s legs were amputated when she was eighteen months old. But she didn’t let her challenges keep her from doing a sport that she loved. Instead, she joined a swim club at age ten, the only athlete with a physical disability on the team.

“There were moments I struggled, but my teammates treated me like a friend,” Jessica said. “I just decided that I was going to be unstoppable and I wasn’t going to let my legs hold me back.”

Jessica’s legs did not hold her back. She competed in her first Paralympic Games in 2004 in Athens, Greece. She is now a five time Paralympian and has won twenty-three medals at the Games, including sixteen golds.

The first Paralympics, originally called the Stoke Mandeville Games, took place in London, England in 1948. Created for veterans injured during World War II, these games hosted sixteen servicemen and women competing in



archery. Since then, the Games have grown in size and popularity. In 2021, over four thousand athletes competed in Tokyo, Japan in sports ranging from triathlon to badminton.

The athletes who compete at the Paralympics come from many different countries and cultures. They have different disabilities and play different sports. But what they have in common is a fighting spirit.

As Jessica said, “With the never ending support of my family I understood that the only thing that was going to impact my future was my attitude towards my life.” With her success, Jessica has inspired many other athletes. Her attitude is pure gold.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. How old was Jessica when she qualified for the Paralympic Games?
 - a. 10
 - b. 12
 - c. 14
 - d. 18 months

2. Where did Jessica compete in her first Paralympic Games?
 - a. Athens, Greece
 - b. Tokyo, Japan
 - c. London, England
 - d. Rome, Italy

3. What was Jessica's attitude towards her disability?
 - a. She felt sorry for herself.
 - b. She wanted people to give her extra help because of her challenges.
 - c. She wanted to do the same things that everyone else did.
 - d. She was nervous about trying to compete with people who didn't have disabilities.

4. Why do you think the Paralympics were created for veterans?
 - a. People felt pity for veterans injured in the war and wanted to give them medals.
 - b. Only veterans knew how to do archery.
 - c. People who have fought in wars need to compete separately from those who have not served in the military.
 - d. The games were a way to honor the fighting spirit of those who had been injured in the war and to show that they could still compete physically despite their disabilities.

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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