

The Indomitable Cindi Hart

Athlete, coach, survivor, inspiration—Indiana (USA) Cindi Hart lives life to its fullest

by Ryan Eades

When Cindi Hart was announced as the coach for Team USA Cycling for the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China, she was given one simple task—lead her cyclists to the same unprecedented success she led her speed skaters to in the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Nagano, Japan, where a record 26 of 27 of her athletes won medals.

That success in Nagano not only earned Hart an encore as a coach for Team USA, it also earned her the International Olympic Committee's award for the 2005 Volunteer Coach of the Year.

To repeat such outstanding feats would seem like a tall order to most people, but Hart, who is also a champion cyclist and speed skater, having competed for more than 20 years and winning multiple state championships and national accolades, is far from being most people.

In May of 2004, Hart was diagnosed with Ductile Carcinoma, a highly aggressive form of breast cancer. In the true embodiment of the spirit, courage and fortitude so often displayed by the Special Olympics athletes she coaches, Hart battled her cancer head on and like so many races over the last two decades, she found herself victorious.

"Cindi Hart is to breast cancer what Lance Armstrong is to testicular cancer," said Dr. Robert Goulet Jr., M.D., associate professor of surgery and medical director of the Indiana University Breast Care and Research Center.

Throughout her chemotherapy treatment, Hart continued to coach and compete in cycling and skating, to show her athletes that all obstacles could be overcome. Eighteen days after her last intravenous chemotherapy

treatment, she won her division in the American Bicycling Racing Track Nationals. Just two months after her mastectomy, she won three top medals in the U.S. speed skating long-track championships. In 2006, Hart won gold medals for speed skating in both the Midwest States Championships and the Indiana State Championships. She also won a bronze medal in the U.S. Long Track Speed Skating Nationals.

One of Hart's biggest rewards in life she says is to transcend her strength of spirit and her life experiences to the Special Olympics athletes she has coached as a volunteer for Special Olympics over the last 20 years. "I had one particular autistic athlete who was not very verbal coming into the 2005 Special Olympics World Games in Japan. But he interacted more and more throughout the Games and then held his head up high when he was awarded a gold medal. To see the tears of joy and pride in his parents' eyes and to hear how he still follows the program and quotes me to his parents regarding his training is amazing. Knowing that you have positively influenced a young life is the greatest reward."

"The Special Olympics World Games is an environment where these athletes are heroes," Hart continued. "We are fortunate to be the spectators and facilitators of the experience. To watch them bloom as individuals, creating a culture of their own, reaching out to others and showing pride in self and in country is a rare and wonderful experience."

Since May 2004, Hart has won 22 gold, silver or bronze medals in state, national or international cycling and skating events, she was featured on the Discovery Travel Channel program "Chasing Lance: The Fans" and, she was named the inaugural "Honorary Survivor" for the Komen Foundation's Race for the Cure.



Bank of America Sponsors 2007 World Games Team USA

Bank of America has donated \$500,000 to support Special Olympics Team USA, a group of approximately 400 athletes and 170 coaches selected to represent all 50 United States in the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, People's Republic of China.

Bank of America is a long-standing supporter of Special Olympics. The company's donation to Team USA will be used to assist in the coaching and training of Team USA athletes as well as transporting the delegation to Shanghai for the World Summer Games. Additionally, Bank of America employees will volunteer at various local Team USA events.

"Team USA athletes share the same ideals that guide Bank of America associates—dedication, performance and teamwork," said Andrew Plepler, President, Bank of America Charitable Foundation. "We are proud to support Special Olympics athletes, and their skill, determination and courage, as they pursue excellence at the 2007 Games in China."

Hart lives in Indianapolis with her husband of 16 years, Ken, and their daughter Madison, 11. She is a co-founder of the IndySpeed Sports Club in Indiana where she coaches U.S. Speed Skating and Special Olympics Indiana athletes, is a registered nurse and works as a clinical informatics specialist at the Regenstrief Institute for Health Care. She is the Indiana spokesperson for the Susan Komen Foundation and an active member of "Cyclists Combating Cancer", where she speaks about overcoming obstacles and cancer awareness. To learn more about Cindi Hart, cancer survivor, go to www.kenhart.com/cancer.

Team USA Cycling coach Cindi Hart and President, Bank of America Iowa, Deon Pitsor, hold up a ceremonial check for \$500,000 to announce Bank of America's sponsorship of Team USA for the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games. The announcement was made at a press conference during the USA National Games in Ames, Iowa.

Photo: Ryan Eades

A First-Place Finish

A strategic partnership among Special Olympics Illinois and Special Olympics Missouri, Gateway International Raceway, Shop 'n Save, and the Missouri-Illinois Dodge Dealers was lauded as the cause-related category winner of the 2005 Bill Veeck Sports Sponsorship Award. The award from Saint Louis University Cook School of Business was presented on 29 July 2006 at Gateway Raceway. (From left) Mark Musso, President Special Olympics Missouri; Marlene Gebhard, President Shop 'n Save; Doug Snyder, President Special Olympics Illinois. The Special Olympics race car, driven by up-and-comer Blake Bjorklund, finished sixth.

