

Diving In

By Kevin Fritz

This 14-year-old Orlando resident has her eyes on the Olympics.

She may be only 14 years old, but her dossier reads of someone much older and wiser. A diver since she was 5, **Wallace “Wally” Layland** from **Southwest Orlando** has spent much of her life in the cool waters of pools worldwide, most often poised on the edge of diving boards and platforms preparing to twist and turn her way into the record books.

While Wally is an expert one-meter and three-meter springboard diver, high above the water on the platform is where she really excels.

From 22 feet above the water, Wally’s front one-and-a-half pike earned her a 10 and her first national title at the 2009 Speedo Junior National Championships. She also placed second on the one-meter springboard and now has five national events under her belt.

On the international stage, she won the gold on the three-meter, the silver on platform and the bronze on one-meter springboard at the 2009 Junior Pan American Championships in Calgary, Canada.

“For the Pan Am games we got a suitcase, sweats, T-shirts and a shammy that all said USA,” says the Junior Olympic diver. “Wearing the USA uniform is totally awesome.”

And now that she is 14, Wally is eligible to compete on the 33-foot platform—the highest platform in an Olympic event. She qualified for her first Senior Nationals earlier this year and hopes to represent the U.S. from the 10-meter platform at the World Junior Diving Championships in September.

Wally, who trains with Team Orlando Diving at the YMCA Aquatic Center on International Drive, is fortunate enough to be surrounded by some of the best in the business, driving her to always do her best. She is coached by former Canadian Olympian and national coach of the year **Wendy Lerew**, who is leaving for Texas A&M this fall, only to be replaced by former U.S. Olympic diver **Mark Ruiz**, who also grew up with Team Orlando. Wally’s father, **Lenny** was a prominent diver in his own right, diving for the University of Miami. He was a member of the All-American Diving Team, the U.S. National Diving Team for eight years and was inducted into the UM Sports Hall of Fame.

Not surprising, Wally has set her goals high—to win an Olympic medal. That would most likely occur in the 2016 summer games, although that doesn’t mean she won’t be trying to make the 2012 team.

Lerew, who has been her coach for six years, has

watched Wally progress into a diver capable of making the Olympic team.

“Wally has the chance of representing the United States,” Lerew says. “Most likely we will see her at the 2016 games in Rio de Janeiro.”

Wally’s training takes up so much time that she left Pine Castle Christian Academy for online schooling last year. “I really never get a break,” she comments about her commitment to the sport. “I don’t have much time for a life outside of diving.”

However, Wally really does treasure the travelling aspect of her young career. The family trips for diving competitions to Puerto Rico, China, England and Canada have been a nice respite, and she even enjoyed a side trip with her dad to Ireland after the meet in England.

Her next trip is stateside, to Tucson, Ariz. for the Junior World Championships. It is there Wally hopes to not only add to her medal count, but more importantly, step up another rung on the ladder on her way to the top. **L**



COURTESY OF THE LAYLAND FAMILY

Diver Wally Layland of Orlando in mid-twist as she makes a perfect dive.

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