

PUBLICATION

Baker's Dozen: Women Olympians Leading the Way

Issue 2, 2024

In every corner of the world, women athletes are not just excelling in their sports – they're leading with resilience, determination, and unmatched excellence. The Olympic Games offered us a front-row seat to witness the incredible strength and visionary leadership of women Olympians and para-Olympians. It's a moment to celebrate these extraordinary women whose paths to the top are paved with perseverance, strategic thinking, and the ability to inspire us all. Their stories of triumph remind us that true strength isn't just physical – it comes from the heart and mind of a leader.

We asked our Baker Women Leadership Team to share with us women Olympians that have inspired them and why:

1. Megan Rapinoe helped lead the U.S. to a gold medal at the 2012 Olympic Games in London. She is the first and so far, the only player, male or female, to score an Olimpico at the Olympic Games. Megan being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, has done philanthropic work for the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee. She is also an ambassador for Athlete Ally, a non-profit organization that focuses on ending homophobia and transphobia in sports.



- *Mark A. Baugh, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Baker Donelson*

2. Continuing a family military legacy, Elizabeth Marks joined the Army at just 17 years old. After being injured in the line of duty as a combat medic, she took up swimming merely as a recovery effort to help her get back to being "fit for duty." Six months later she was accepted into the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program (WCAP). This will be her third paralympic games with five medals already under her belt, including two gold. Elizabeth is still on active duty as a Sergeant First Class in the U.S. Army.



- *Danielle Smith, Baker Women Manager, Baker Donelson*

3. I came of age cheering for Jackie Joyner-Kersey. I was drawn to her because of her joy, power, style, and ability to make the impossible look effortless. Now I realize she was competing in the heptathlon, which means she simultaneously had to be nearly flawless in seven different events. Working on each would take time from the other – what a lesson on excellence and the accompanying struggle of juggling priorities and balance.



- *Christy Tosh Crider, Chair, Baker Women, Baker Donelson*

4. I admire Simone Biles and the amount of courage it took for her to pull out of the Tokyo Olympics. She took the time she knew she needed for her mental health and came back stronger than ever for Paris 2024!



- *Kimberly A. Chojnacki, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

5. Having been born prematurely with a disability called congenital arthrogryposis, Amalia Perez started swimming at an early age as part of her rehabilitation process. Amalia has participated in powerlifting for over 20 years and has won back-to-back five gold medals. She is from Mexico City and is the only Paralympic powerlifter to be champion in three divisions. She is also coached by her husband and is a proud mother.



- *Marisol Gonzalez, Diversity and Baker Women Coordinator, Baker Donelson*

6. Katie Ledecky – I'm always fascinated by people with a work ethic like hers. According to her coach, her success is more a result of her hard work and drive than technique, which is incredibly inspiring. She is now the most decorated U.S. female Olympian with 14 Olympic medals (nine gold, four silver, and one bronze).



- *Emily Stroope, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

7. Katie Ledecky – she first conquered the world as a 15-year-old at the 2012 Olympics and has only grown more dominant with age. She has won Olympic Gold in every distance from 200 m to 1500 m. In 2024, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom – the highest honor a civilian can receive in the U.S. In addition to winning every major award and honor, she has also won 21 world championship gold medals – the most in history for any female swimmer.



- *Katherine I. Funk, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

8. I have been inspired by Melissa Stockwell. She lost her leg while being deployed to Iraq in 2004. She was the first female American soldier to lose a limb in active combat, when her vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. She has since competed in the 2008 Paralympics as a swimmer, and then in the 2016, 2021, and now 2024 Paralympic games as a triathlete. She is 44 and has two kids. What an inspirational story!



- *Kristine L. Roberts, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

9. Allyson Felix's journey is so inspirational. She overcame significant obstacles, including a life-threatening pregnancy complication. Her ability to return to top form and compete post-pregnancy is a testament to her resilience and determination. Allyson has been a vocal advocate for maternal rights, especially in the sports industry. She holds 11 Olympic medals, including seven golds.



- *Caldwell G. Collins, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

10. Alice Coachman became the first Black women from any country to win an Olympic gold medal. Her victory in the high jump at the 1948 London Olympics broke racial and gender barriers, proving that talent and determination can overcome societal obstacles.



- *Mark A. B. Carlson, Chief Growth Officer, Baker Donelson*

11. Jordan Chiles - I admire Jordan because, with the controversy going on, she has prioritized her mental health and taken a break from social media. Sometimes you have to step away and not engage.



- *Tenia L. Clayton, Associate, Baker Donelson*

12. Sha'Carri Richardson – it was a huge setback for sprinter Sha'Carri not be allowed to compete in Tokyo in 2021. Regardless of if you think her not being allowed to compete was appropriate or not, she handled it like a champion. She did not let it defeat her. Instead, she used that adversity to really get to know herself and she became stronger. She was such a bright light in Paris and her passion was obvious. And, she totally killed it, winning a Silver and a Gold medal. She is a role model.



- *Jamie Ballinger, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

13. Sunisa Lee - As an Auburn grad, it was so exciting to watch her compete in the 2020 Olympics knowing she would be a Freshman at my alma mater that Fall. It was incredible watching her compete with poise in events she hadn't even planned to compete in until that very day. Suni exhibited that same strength and resilience when she returned for the 2024 Olympics after battling two incurable kidney diseases. Just a year before the Paris Olympics, she had to quit training completely because of her diseases and thought she would never be able to compete again. But Suni persevered again, and with the help of her doctors, she was able to return to the gym and do the impossible, helping win a team gold medal and even winning bronze medals in the individual all-around and uneven bars.



- *Abby Parker Nix, Strive Co-Chair, Associate, Baker Donelson*