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OU graduate a medal contender in 2004 Paralympics

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

OU alumna Cheryl Angelelli, CAS '93, has her eye on the prize at the **2004 Paralympic Games** in Athens, Greece, this September.

Angelelli, a swimmer, is a medal contender after finishing first in the 200-meter freestyle and second place in the 100-meter and 50-meter freestyle at the selection meet in April. She's also ranked second in the world in the 200-meter freestyle.

This is her second trip to the Paralympic Games. In 2000, she traveled to Sydney, Australia, where she finished sixth in the 50-meter and 200-meter freestyle, seventh in the 100-meter freestyle, and was a member of the women's 200-meter medley relay, which set a new American record and placed fifth.

"There's a little more pressure this time. I'm so close, I can taste it," Angelelli said. "I am very excited to go to the Paralympics. For some people, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity, and I'm fortunate that this is my second time. I feel really blessed that I have the opportunity to go back and compete at that level."

Her biggest competition at the 2004 games, Sept. 17-28, will be a Japanese swimmer. "She's a phenomenon, she's just so far ahead of everyone else," Angelelli said. "Everybody else is fighting for second and third place. I'll be happy with any kind of medal."

As a child, Angelelli dreamed of becoming a champion swimmer. Her dreams were almost cut short when she sustained a spine injury while diving into a pool at age 14. The accident left her a quadriplegic without the use of her legs and fingers. After a long rehabilitation process, Angelelli reentered the pool and became a national swim champion. She was introduced to wheelchair sports while at the **Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan**.

The Fraser resident trains five days a week in preparation for the games. Her trainer, husband Shawn Kornoelija, also is the coach for the men's Paralympics swim team. The pair met at the Sydney games and married in 2002.

The Paralympics is the highest athletic achievement for elite athletes with physical disabilities. It is second in size only to the Olympics among world sporting events, with athletes from more than 30 countries competing in 21 events, 18 of which also are contested in the Olympics. The event is held two weeks after each Olympics using the same facilities.

After this year's Paralympics, Angelelli is looking forward to retiring.

"The competition is getting younger and it's hard to hold down a full-time job in addition to training. But, I said that last time," she said with a laugh.

Angelelli graduated from OU with a communications degree and is the marketing and public relations manager for the **Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan** as well a 2000 inductee in the **Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame**.

SUMMARY

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