

# Lamorinda's track team the Avengers are back

Submitted by Lupi Gutierrez Beagle



Photos Lupi Gutierrez Beagle

From left: Aimee Gee, Melinda Cooper, Sara Ratchford, Izaiah Garcia, Andrew Beagle, Simon Keenan, Elan Grant

Olympians track and field team known as the Avengers returned with a vengeance at the 2024 NorCal Special Olympics Summer Games track & field event. The Games were hosted the last weekend in June by Santa Clara State University, where opening ceremonies kicked off the annual event Friday night with the Parade of

Athletes at Stevens Stadium Buckshaw Field, followed by the 2024 Law Enforcement Torch Run. Athletes from over thirty California counties were represented to compete in the largest local competition, highlighting thousands of athletes and coaches coming together in the spirit of competition and inclusion.

Participating for the Lamorinda team were four Contra Costa athletes with a mighty combination of intensity, perseverance and passion for their respective events. The team secured six gold and four silver medals between them.

Aimee Gee, 23, is the veteran of the team and won gold in both shot put and in her first ever turbo javelin competition. She also competed in the 100-meter where she took silver.

Melinda Briones, 32, who played softball in the 2015 Games, recognized her heats were stacked at her first track & field Summer Games. She received participation in shot put and placed fourth in her first time competing in the turbo javelin, just missing a bronze medal. Briones also placed fifth in the 100-meter.

Andrew Beagle, 15, a rising sophomore and wrestler at Miramonte High School, returned to his second Summer Games. Beagle took gold in his preferred event, the turbo javelin, with a throwing distance of 13.65 meters. He placed silver in both the running long jump and in the 100-meter.

Incoming Miramonte High School Freshman Simon Keenan, who competed in the swimming portion of the 2023 Games last year, switched over to participate with the Avengers in his first track and field showing. Keenan, who is the youngest on the team, returned home with three Gold Medals in the 100-meter, turbo javelin, and running long jump.

The Avengers also competed in the 100-meter relay for the first time as a team. After a



Team members: Andrew Beagle, Melinda Briones, Aimee Gee, Simon Keenan

referee's false start, Keenan ran his entire leg before he was stopped. Once the race resumed, Keenan ran it again with all three baton handoffs flawlessly executed. Beagle closed and caught the other team with incredible speed and was just edged out by literally a tenth of a second. A great effort from all four legs.



KayleeRae Walls

## Acalanes grad Jewel Roemer

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Despite being ten years younger than Maggie Steffens, there is a long-term connection through their parents as Maggie's father, Carlos, and John Roemer played together at Cal. "When Jewel was little, we would go and watch Maggie play," John said. "Now they're on the same team and sometimes I have to pinch myself because it's hard to believe we are where we are at right now."

Growing up in such a water polo rich environment has contributed to Jewel's development.

"Watching Maggie play when I was younger and having women coaches like Natalie Benson, Coralie Simmons, and Heather Petrie, learning their history and what they had to go through just to play the sport is super inspiring and I really appreciate them and their efforts and how much they have invested and still invest in the sport. I've learned so much from all of them, and you can just tell how much they love us and how inspiring they been and what a huge role they played in my being where I am right now."

Having worked so

closely with Jewel, John sees what has made her so special in the water.

"Jewel has always had the passion and the innate ability to focus along with her mental toughness," John said "She plays the five position (the left handed position) for the US team because she sees everything, and she's passing to her right handed teammates strong side and the comment has been made that she has the vision of an owl with a field vision of 360 degrees."

Yet, with all of her accomplishments, Jewel continues to look for ways to take her game to an-

other level. "I am still looking to improve my passing in general, setting my teammates up for shots or passing the ball somewhere where I know that that person can hit someone else for a shot - just reading the game better. I'm also working on communicating in the pool, especially on defense which is something that we all have to improve on. The team does put me in great positions to distribute the ball well, so I've learned a lot and gotten better."

Though 5'6" and going against bigger players, size has not been an issue for her. "As an attacker, I

use my quickness over brute strength, but I've grown a lot stronger too and the water is a good neutralizer if you do the right things like have strong legs," Jewel explained.

Jewel is a human biology major at Stanford, which also has some connection to her being a water polo player. "Having suffered some sports injuries, I really enjoy learning about how the human body works and optimizing health through things like nutrition, and majoring in human biology has allowed me to explore things I'm interested in and may lead me into

some field of medicine in the future," Jewel said

Paris brings back great memories for Jewel, having competed there last May. "Paris is really a beautiful city and when we last played there, we were allowed to go explore the city and eat really great food and do all the touristy things," Jewel said. "So, at the Olympics we are going to be really focused and see it as more of a work trip."

Jewel has scored a goal in each of her first two games in the Olympics, a 15-6 win over Greece and a 13-11 loss to Spain. The team will next play Italy on Wednesday.

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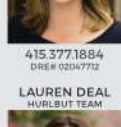
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