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2017 Travel & Training Fund Recipients



The Women's Sports Foundation has awarded a total of \$78,000 to 15 athletes and five teams, in 17 sports and across 12 states in 2017 through our Travel & Training Fund program. With many athletes training for the upcoming 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic and Paralympic Games, World Championships and more, the Travel & Training Fund helps fuel the athletic dreams of athletes, and is generously supported by WSF National Partner Gatorade.

*Biographical information provided at the time of application submission, March 2017

Aja Evans, Bobsled, Homewood, Ill.

After claiming the bronze medal in bobsled at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games, Aja Evans is back and fully recovered from her ACL injury to win gold at the upcoming 2018 Olympic Winter Games. This year alone, Aja took a first place victory, a second-place finish and three third place medals at various International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation World Cup events. Not only does Aja excel on the ice, but she has also found success in her very own non-profit organization called the A.J.A. Foundation (Aspiring Journeys Ahead), which aims to help kids in her hometown community of Chicago, Illinois. Her passion for giving back reflects the values at WSF and ultimately, her athletic successes have earned her a WSF Travel & Training Fund grant, which will help cover off-season training costs such as coaching and travel fees.

Alyssa Oh, Gymnastics – Trampoline, Rocklin, Calif.

At the young age of 15, Alyssa Oh is a three-time World Age Group Champion and a member of the team that won gold at the 2016 Pacific Rim Championships. Alyssa is now on the quest to add more accomplishments to her outstanding record, as she aspires to represent the U.S. at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games and the 2020 Olympic Games. In support of Alyssa's training, her family has chosen to split up so that Alyssa may train in another city, which subsequently led to their financial hardship of relocation. With the aid from the WSF Travel & Training Fund, Alyssa plans to train with elite level coaches and athletes and to attend monthly National Team Training Camps in order to continue her growth as an athlete and the pursuit of her Olympic dreams.

APU Nordic Ski Center, Anchorage, Ark.

The APU Nordic Ski Center is known for producing the nation's top nordic skiers, with four out of the nine women on the U.S. team for the World Championships being APU athletes. At the 2017 Nordic World Ski Championships, two of the APU team members placed within the top four in the world. The members of the team are currently striving to medal at the 2018 Olympic Winter Games, a feat of which is more than possible to achieve with the right training opportunities. One of these training sessions will take place in Park City, Utah, where the members will be attending a critical fall altitude training camp. The financial aid provided by the WSF Travel & Training Fund will lessen these expenses, in hopes that it will push the team towards representing the U.S. at the 2018 Olympic Winter Games.

Christina Birch, Cycling, Los Angeles, Calif.

Christina Birch is a highly decorated cyclist with her sights set on becoming a medal-capable athlete at the 2020 Olympic Games. Over the past two years, Christina has won three national championship titles, multiple national medals and a silver medal at her first international race at the 2016 Pan-American Championships. Christina is one of the top-ranked female endurance track cyclists in America and is training to earn a permanent spot on Team USA. However, after suffering a crash in 2016, the financial burden of medical exams and treatment expenses ultimately set Christina back. Fortunately, with the assistance of the Travel & Training Fund, Christina hopes to participate in more upcoming international competitions in order to qualify for a World Cup season as part of the U.S. National Team.

Erika Flowers, Cross-Country Skiing, Belgrade, Mont.

After earning three All-America honors at Dartmouth College, Erika Flowers joined the SMS Elite Team in Stratton, Vermont, where she trains for over 750 hours a year. As one of the top 13 cross-country skiers in the country, Erika earned her spot to represent Team USA at the World Cup Finals in 2017. Yet, her goals still lay ahead as she hopes to qualify for the 2018 Olympic Winter Games as well as eventually finish in the top 10 in the world. Erika will use the WSF Travel & Training Fund to train during the off-season in New Zealand, allowing for more time practicing her technique on the snow. Erika also embodies the values of the Women's Sports Foundation, as she works as an ambassador for *Fast and Female* and a writer for her own *Wander Magazine*, which empowers and educates women to pursue their goals in both sport and life.

Evita Griskenas, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Orland Park, Ill.

Evita Griskenas is a member of the USA National Team for rhythmic gymnastics and is a hopeful candidate for the 2020 Olympic Games. She is the 2016 National Qualifier All-Around Champion and is currently ranked No. 2 in the senior national team ranking after placing second in the U.S. National Challenge competition. Based on her outstanding record, Evita was one of two athletes selected by the International Selection Committee to represent the U.S. in a world cup series. However, she faces the challenges of meeting her full potential of talent and drive due to her own limited resources. Coming from a low-income family while pursuing rhythmic gymnastics – a self-funded sport – has proved its difficulties. With the WSF Travel & Training Fund, Evita plans to represent the U.S. in more international competitions.

Joana Orbon, Karate, Sacramento, Calif.

Joana Orbon has her eyes set on becoming one of the first members on the U.S. Karate Team to compete in the sport's Olympic debut at the 2020 Tokyo Games. Joana is currently the women's -61kg middleweight category national champion and has been competing with the U.S. National Team since 2008. In pursuit of her Olympic dreams, the primary struggle Joana faces is finding sponsors and funding. With Olympic qualifying events every month all across Europe, Africa and Asia, Joana needs to hold a consistently high rank in order to receive recognition and a chance to make the team. With the assistance of the WSF Travel & Training Fund, Joana will be able to travel to more competitions that will undoubtedly better her chances of qualifying for the inaugural karate competition in the 2020 Olympic Games.

Kamali Thompson, Fencing, Teaneck, N.J.

Kamali Thompson is a member of the Women's Saber National Team and is currently training to pursue her dream of representing Team USA at the 2020 Olympic Games. Kamali has won two gold medals in the Division I women's saber at the recent North American Cup in Detroit and the Individual National Championships, and she is in contention to qualify for the 2017 Senior World Team. As a third year medical student, Kamali has had to balance her time training, studying and working as a referee to help cover the costs that fencing demands. With the support of the Travel & Training Fund, Kamali hopes to have the sufficient funds to support her athletic fencing expenses and to better prepare herself for competitions.

Katie Jackson, Equestrian, Austin, Texas

Currently ranked as the No. 1 Grade V Para-Equestrian in the United States, Katie Jackson is an amputee and cancer survivor who has refused to let her adversity take control of her life and often competes against able-bodied riders. Her impressive record of achievements include: recipient of the Perpetual Sportsmanship Award, two-time Dover Dressage Medal winner, and State Champion in the United States Dressage Federation Region Championships. However, one of Katie's biggest obstacles is the expense of traveling with her equine partners. Traveling to competitions is essential for Katie to gain experience and points in order to become part of the U.S. Team at the upcoming 2018 World Equestrian Games. As a recipient of the WSF Travel & Training Fund, Katie hopes to offset some of these expenses and relieve some financial burdens.

Kelly Gunther, Speedskating, West Jordan, Utah

Kelly Gunther, a hardworking Olympic speedskater, has dreamt of competing and medaling in the Olympic Games since she was just six years old. After what was thought to be a career-ending injury, Kelly managed to overcome this significant battle in an effort to continue training for the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. Her major competitions this year, the World Single Distances Championships and the USA Long Track Championships, are only a start to another successful season of speedskating. In addition to her commitment to the sport, Kelly's enthusiasm for giving back to her communities of Detroit and Cleveland have ignited her hopes of starting a foundation of her own. The WSF Travel & Training Fund will be providing Kelly with transportation expenses when she travels for training, as well as airline tickets and accommodations, all of which are necessities to take her to the next level in speedskating.

Laura Goodkind, Rowing, Santa Monica, Calif.

Laura Goodkind has defeated the most devastating odds: suffering from a chronic illness since 2014 and homelessness since 2015. However through her undeniable resilience and positive outlook, Laura successfully competed in the 2016 Paralympic Games as a member of the U.S. Rowing team and took home a fourth place finish in the 1,000m. Still, Laura's goals remain ahead of her as she aspires to medal at the 2020 Paralympic Games, and in order for this to be possible she will need to have access to an adaptive boat and oars to train on her own schedule. Laura plans on using the money granted by the WSF Travel & Training Fund to purchase this boat, which will improve her training, and eventually push her even closer to earning a Paralympic medal.

Lindsay Schwartz, Track and Field, Santa Barbara, Calif.

From working 20 hours a week while in college, to taking up side jobs in order to travel the world for heptathlons, Lindsay Schwartz's work ethic and determination are undeniable. Just last year, Lindsay took first place at the Sam Adams Combined Events Invitational and third place at the Thorpe Cup. Now, she is setting her goals even higher: to compete in the World Championships in 2019 and the 2020 Olympic Games. With her best efforts forward and the help of the Women's Sports Foundation, Lindsay is confident that she can achieve this. Lindsay competes in not one, but seven events. The WSF Travel & Training Fund will help Lindsay offset her travel expenses to international meets.

Megan Rolland, Track and Field, Boise, Idaho

As a former emergency room nurse, Megan Rolland understands true dedication as well as how to perform under pressure. Once she decided to change careers and pursue professional track and field full-time, her hard work translated into a 1 minute drop off of her 3,000m steeplechase personal record, earning her a seventh-place finish in the 2016 U.S. Olympic trials. In pursuit of her goals of qualifying for the world championship team in 2017 and 2019 and the Olympic team in 2020, Megan plans on utilizing her resources for physical therapy and strength training, while also committing to multiple altitude training sessions a year. With these plans in mind, Megan will use the WSF Travel & Training Fund grant to support her expenses on competition, flights for international meets and to pay her coaches and physical trainers.

Miranda Melville, Track and Field, Chula Vista, Calif.

Miranda Melville is currently ranked No. 1 in the U.S. for the 15K, 10,000m and the 5,000m race walk, and is ranked No. 2 in the 20K race walk. She holds the American record in the 5,000m and the 10,000m indoor race walk and has 11 national championship titles. Miranda is an elite athlete who is looking to add to her already extensive record at the 2017 World Race Walking Cup and the 2020 Olympic Games. Financially, for a top-level female athlete like Miranda, there are limited resources to access support for training and travel fees. The majority of the burden has fallen onto Miranda's shoulders, making it difficult to train and travel efficiently. Miranda will use the WSF Travel & Training Fund grant to help relieve financial tensions and support her in her athletic endeavors.

Savannah Graybill, Skeleton, Denver, PA.

As a former college field hockey player at American University, Savannah Graybill soon found another calling as she became involved with USA Skeleton in 2011. Since then, Savannah's dedication to excellence has been proven through her numerous achievements: being selected for the U.S. National Team, finishing second overall in the Intercontinental Cup Tour, winning double gold in the Lake Placid ICC races and being a world championship team member. Today, Savannah is trying to seize every advantage possible to help her perform at her best; but without proper funding, her ability to travel and train are considerable feats. With the financial aid of the WSF Travel & Training Fund, Savannah plans to purchase new equipment, cover travel fees and support coaching expenses.

USA Synchro, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Comprised of the top 12 female synchronized swimmers from all across the country, the USA Synchro team is looking to place within the top 10 at the 2017 World Championships in Hungary, in order to secure a spot in the 2020 Olympic Games. Their tough training regimen is accompanied by their advocacy for female athletes, as they serve on the board of USA Synchro as well as participate in events with Athletes for Hope. Their ultimate success in and out of the pool would be enhanced through a final preparatory camp in Malta, before heading to the 2017 World Championships. Importantly, the funds for this training camp will be supported by the Women's Sports Foundation, providing the team with the opportunity to excel.

USA Women's Deaf Volleyball Team, Bowie, Md.

Comprised of 12 female athletes from all across the country, the USA Women's Deaf Volleyball Team claimed two international titles in 2016 at the Deaf Pan American Games and the Deaf World Championships. At these two meets, six of the athletes won awards presented by the International Volleyball Federation: best server, spiker, receiver, digger and setter. With their combined efforts, their eyes are set on accomplishing the exceptional goal of winning gold at the 2017 Deaflympics. Eventually, the team hopes to create a stronger foundation and support for deaf girls across the country through the sport of volleyball. With the assistance of the WSF Travel & Training Fund, the team will be able to cover travel expenses for their key players at the Deaflympics in Turkey, as well as provide them with the resources to compete and reach the medal stand.

U.S. Women's National Lacrosse Team, Sparks, Md.

Historically, U.S. Lacrosse has assured that members of the women's national teams do not have to pay to represent their country abroad. Thus far, their success has been evident: seven gold medals in nine world championships. However, this year, U.S. Lacrosse – the governing body of the sport – faces the unique challenge of funding the participation of the U.S. Women's National Team in two international tournaments back to back, increasing the financial burden on the nonprofit organization. Fortunately, with the help of the WSF Travel & Training Fund, the U.S. Women's National Lacrosse Team hopes to significantly offset travel expenses and ease the burden of fundraising.

Water Polo Women's Youth Pipeline Team, Huntington Beach, Calif.

The USA Water Polo Women's Youth Pipeline Team has accumulated five gold medals and one silver medal at the pipeline level since 2013. With a dual focus on attending competitive matches, such as the World University Games, as well as improving the scouting and coaching process, this team understands the significance of a well-rounded approach for moving to the next level. They know that along with hard work and dedication, it is imperative to attend high-profile tournaments in order to maintain a top international ranking. The WSF Travel & Training Fund will allow the team to attend the 2017 World University Games.

Winter Vinecki, Freestyle Skiing, Park City, Utah

Eighteen-year-old Winter Vinecki is a five-year veteran of freestyle skiing and has already progressed to competing in doubles all across the globe in world cups as one of the youngest members of the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team. In 2016, Winter was named Jr. National Champion and qualified for the U.S. National Ski Team; and, with the success of her early season events, Winter was able to qualify for the FIS World Cup season and accompany the U.S. World Cup team to Minsk and Moscow. Winter strives to make the 2018 Olympic Winter Games but with financial burdens, her equipment quality is limited and her training is often stifled. The WSF Travel & Training Fund will help Winter in the pursuit of achieving her Olympic dreams.