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Cailin Currie swims at Andover Y Heading for the Paralympics

By Paul Leighton Staff Writer

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DAVID LE/Staff photo. Eighteen-year-old Cailin Currie, of Danvers, sports a USA shirt as she marches in the annual Danvers Park and Rec parade last Thursday. Currie, who made a special appearance for the parade, will be swimming in the Paralympics in Rio next month.

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Caitlin Currie, of Danvers, is a visually impaired swimmer who will compete in the Paralympic Games in Rio next month.

DANVERS — The quest for gold in Rio did not end with Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky.

Danvers' own Cailin Currie will swim in the same pool where those Olympic stars earned their medals when she competes in the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro next month.

Cailin, an 18-year-old senior-to-be at Essex Technical High School, leaves for Brazil on Friday and will compete in four swimming events at the Paralympics, which will be held Sept. 7 to 18.

"I'm really excited to swim where the regular Olympics were," she said. "I think I'll do pretty well."

More than 4,350 athletes from 160 countries will compete in 22 sports in the Paralympic Games, which has been held since 1960 for athletes with a range of disabilities.

Cailin was born blind and did not gain any vision until she was 1 year old. She was born with no irises, leaving her eyes extremely sensitive to light. She uses a large-screen computer and a magnifier to help her read. Making out facial expressions in a crowd of people can be difficult.

"She's a kid who was born this way and has worked around it," said her mother, Elaine Currie. "When you get a kid whose vision was impaired since birth, they do so well. She's a smart kid."

In Rio, Cailin will compete against other swimmers with limited vision. The lighting in the pool can make it difficult for her to see when she's doing the backstroke. It can also be tough to see exactly where the wall is when she's executing a flip turn.

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Swimmers are allowed to be assisted by a "tapper," a person who stands on the pool deck holding a long stick with a soft ball on the end and taps swimmers to alert them that the end of the pool is approaching. But Cailin said she does not need the assistance.

She has loved the water since she first went into her backyard pool when she was 6 months old. She started taking lessons under longtime Danvers swimming instructor Paul Lydon and began swimming competitively at age 8 for the Danvers YMCA Dolphins. She also swam for the North Shore Sharks at the Beverly YMCA and now competes for a team at the Andover Y.

"I really enjoyed the water," said Cailin. "I just wanted to see how far I could go with it."

Elaine said many visually impaired kids end up being excluded from sports, but swimming gave Cailin a chance to participate. The sport has helped her learn how to advocate for herself, such as telling her coach she cannot see the clock on the wall to know the time of the next workout. She has also been helped by her sister Kirsten, 15, who is also a swimmer.

The sport has taken Cailin to Scotland and Canada for competitions. Last month she competed in the U.S. Paralympic swimming trials in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she earned one of the 31 slots on the U.S. swim team that will compete in Rio.

Cailin will compete in four events over a span of 10 days — the 100-meter freestyle, 400-meter freestyle, 100-meter butterfly and 100-meter backstroke.

Elaine will travel to Rio with her daughter, who will stay with the other athletes in the Olympic village.

"She's very excited about being with her friends," Elaine said. "You can't get higher for her, where she's going."



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