



Greg Louganis Is Auctioning Off Olympic Medals for HIV Charity

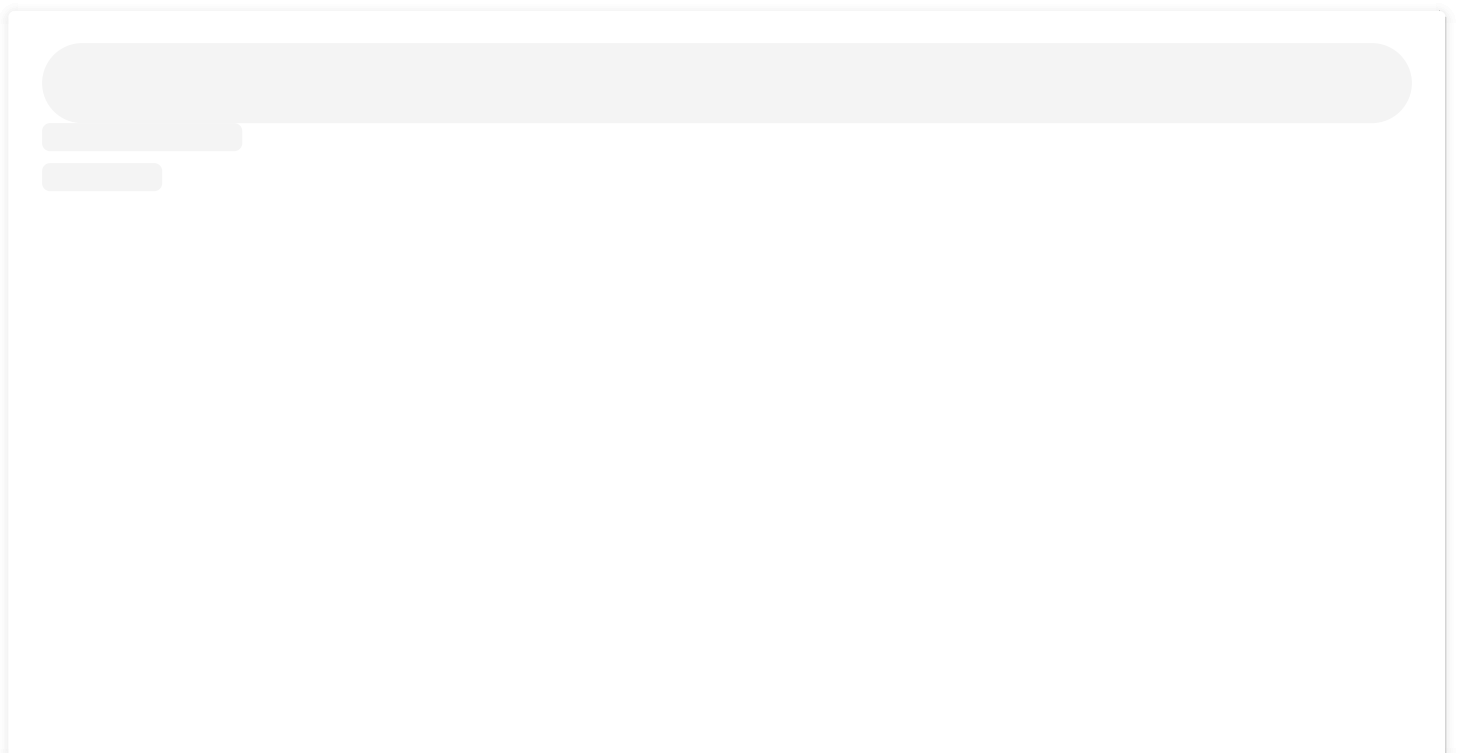
Olympic diver and long-term HIV survivor Greg Louganis is auctioning off three medals to support the HIV nonprofit Damien Center.

March 16, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

Always dreamed of having an Olympic gold medal? Well, now's your chance. Five-time Olympian [Greg Louganis](#), one of the world's best-known divers and an HIV-positive advocate who helped change perceptions of people living with the virus, is auctioning off his remaining Olympic medals in support of the [Damien Center](#) in Indianapolis. The largest AIDS service organization in Indiana, the Damien Center has provided HIV prevention and care since 1987.

Louganis, 62, is parting ways with his three remaining Olympic medals: his 1976 platform silver medal, the first medal he won (at age 16); his first gold medal, for the springboard in 1984; and his last gold medal, for the platform in 1988.

"The medals, they're in the history books," he wrote on [GregLouganis.com](#). "Instead of holding on to them, I'm aiming to share my piece of Olympic history with collectors; together, we can help the Damien Center and its community to grow and thrive."





[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Greg Louganis (@greglouganis)

The starting bids for the medals range from \$350,000 to \$750,000. The winning bidder will take home more than the gold. For example, the [1984 Gold Medal Bundle](#) includes an autographed photo of Louganis waving from the winners' podium, an autographed copy of Newsweek featuring Louganis on the cover and dated August 20, 1984, a letter to Louganis from Senator Strom Thurmond, and Louganis's autographed scorecard.

The money raised by the auction will help fund a new building for the Damien Center's One Home Capital Campaign initiative, which will allow the nonprofit to expand and enhance the care and resources it provides.

Louganis wants to name one area of the new building after his mother, Frances Louganis, and another one after his dear friend [Ryan White](#), who died of AIDS-related complications in April 1990, just before graduating high school. White, who had hemophilia, contracted the virus via a blood transfusion and was one of the first children to be diagnosed with AIDS, at just 13 years old. When his Indiana school discriminated against him, he became a national advocate who fought against fear and misinformation and for his right to attend classes. The [federal Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program](#), which provides care and services to people with HIV, is named in his honor.

Watch this Oprah Winfrey Network special on how White inspired both Louganis and rock icon Elton John:

Louganis famously hit his head on the diving board during the 1988 Seoul Olympics, bleeding into the water. He suffered a concussion, received stitches and wasn't sure he would return to diving. He was living with HIV at the time but didn't share his status with the public until 1995. When he did publicly disclose, Louganis, who is also gay, kick-started a worldwide conversation about the [misconceptions and stigma](#) surrounding HIV and AIDS and the importance of starting treatment.

When discussing the 1988 diving injury, Louganis has mentioned that he wondered at the time what White would have done in that situation. This gave Louganis the courage to persevere and perform the best dive of the competition, which earned him the gold medal the following day.

After White died, Louganis gave one of his Olympic gold medals to White's mother, Jeanne. It is now at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis as part of a display about White.

"The day we unveil the Welcome Center to honor Ryan White, my friend, will mark one of the most important milestones in my life," Louganis said.

Louganis also plans to donate a sculpture of White titled Hope by artist Bill Mack to the Damien Center. The sculpture is one of a limited-edition series by Mack, who gave a sculpture each to Louganis, Elton John, Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Jackson.

“A lot of times we hold things so preciously that it ends up you get strangled by it,” Louganis said in an [NBC Sports interview](#) about giving up possession of these treasures. “Holding things with a light touch is another practice that I’m adapting.”

“Greg personally owning his HIV status has provided a beacon of hope to those living with it, proving that an HIV diagnosis does not mean that your life is over,” Damien Center president and CEO Alan Withey told NBC. “His work on HIV awareness and LGBTQ+ issues has empowered a generation to end the HIV epidemic.”

“[The medals] don’t define me. That’s just a part of who I am, but it’s not all of who I am.”

To learn more about the auction or to bid, click [here](#). The auction ends March 31.

Louganis appeared on the [March 1999 cover](#) of POZ and was profiled in the article “Dog Days of Malibu,” which details his love of dogs and includes an excerpt from his book For the Life of Your Dog.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/greg-louganis-auctioning-olympic-medals-hiv-charity>