Greg Louganis

October 7, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

"When you're a kid growing up, and you think you're gay, you're often teased. But sports can be great for building self-esteem."
- Greg Louganis

Greg Louganis is being honored this year on October 7 for GLBT History Month. He is one of five HIV-positive honorees this month, including Cleve Jones, Robert Mapplethorpe, Randy Shilts and Bill T. Jones.

I don't remember seeing Louganis win his two gold medals in the 1984 Olympics, but I do remember watching his heroic effort in 1988. After hitting his head on the diving board, Louganis was undeterred and again won two gold medals.

By coming out as gay in 1994 and as HIV positive in 1995, Louganis became a role model for many people, including me. I was diagnosed with HIV in 1992, so the impact of my diagnosis was fresh in my psyche. I admired his honesty.

However, he lost millions of dollars in potential endorsements. Public opinion soured on him so much that Anthony Fauci of the CDC had to intervene by stating that the decision by Louganis not to disclose his HIV status in 1988 did not pose a risk of transmission to his fellow competitors or the medical provider that attended him.

After the hoopla of his coming out had settled down, Louganis shared the cover of POZ in 1999 with Nipper, his Jack Russell Terrier, to discuss his dog training book. Louganis has become active in the sport of dogs.

As he describes in his autobiography, Louganis agonized over his decision not to disclose. All of us who are HIV positive can at least sympathize with him. He also at least deserves credit for braving the media storm that followed his disclosure.

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