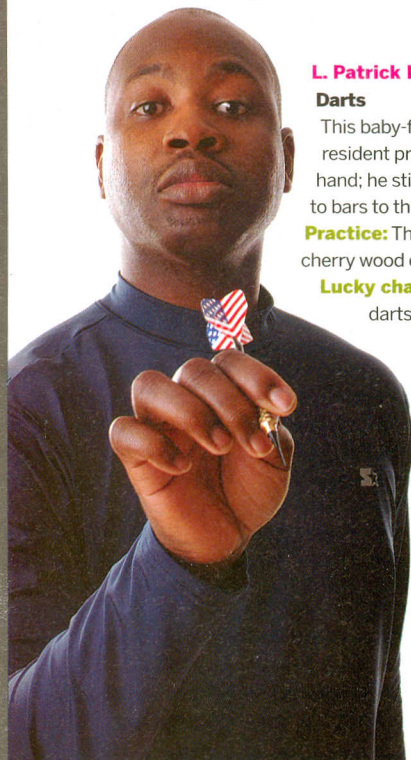


SPORTS

Will & Grace

The first U.S. city to host the **Gay Games** in more than a decade, Chicago expects to welcome some 12,000 participants from about 50 countries beginning July 15th. The weeklong sports and cultural festival takes place among some 40 venues (for information, go to www.gaygameschicago.org). Here are a few standouts representing the 2,000-member Team Chicago and where audiences can go to cheer them on. **BY ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES**



L. Patrick Le Flore

Darts

This baby-faced 33-year-old Rogers Park resident prides himself on his steady hand; he still gets carded when he goes to bars to throw a round.

Practice: Three times a week on a cherry wood electric dartboard

Lucky charm: "I don't play with bar darts. I have my own special darts—I know the weight and the feel. Before a game, I always say, 'God, watch my hand and don't let it shake.' And I go for it."

Competitive mindset:

"I'm going for a medal. I'm reachin' for the sky. I don't know if it'll be bronze, silver, or gold, but I want a medal, and I'm reachin'."

Cheer him on: July 18th through the 22nd at the Hilton Chicago (720 S. Michigan Ave.).

Victoria Stagg Elliot

Figure skating

In 2000, Elliot signed up for beginners' skating classes at the Robert Crown Community Center in Evanston, and within a year was performing in community shows like *The Nutcracker*. In 2002, the 36-year-old won the sport's gold medal at the Gay Games in Sydney.

Practice: Each week, four hours of skating and three hours of strength training, including one hour of ballet

Lucky charm: "Placebo pills. I'll take green Tic Tacs in a prescription medicine bottle and tell myself that it'll calm my nerves, and it makes me feel better. The placebo effect is very real."

Competitive mindset: "I'm only good at skating forward. I don't do many jumps and spins. I don't compete against the Michelle Kwans of the world. I want to prove that beginner skaters that can't do very much can still be entertaining."

Cheer her on: July 18th through 20th at McFetridge Sports Center (3843 N. California Ave.).



Susan Franz and Judith Markowitz

Dance sport (tango, waltz, and quickstep)

Franz (left) and Markowitz, who live in Edgewater, have been dance—and romantic—partners for 26 years.

Practice: Four or five times a week at the Broadway Armory, plus private lessons once or twice a week with coach Gregory Day at the Chicago Dance Studio

Lucky charm: None so far, but, to compete, Franz and Markowitz both will wear gold shoes with one-inch heels.

Competitive mindset: "We would like very much to do well, but I'm not sure winning the competition is as important as doing the competition," Franz says. "We want to be good representatives of lesbians. We don't kid ourselves that we've attained Ginger and Ginger [Rogers] status."

Cheer them on: July 19th and 20th at the Hilton Chicago.

Jeff Olson

Physique

An Uptown doctor, Olson sings in the Chicago Gay Men's Chorus and acts in theatre in his free time. In addition to competing, he will appear in a display of athletes' photographs by Victor Skrebneski, opening July 13th at the City Gallery at the Historic Water Tower (806 N. Michigan Ave.).

Practice: Six times a week for an hour and 15 minutes; works on poses twice a week with a coach

Lucky charm: Music by the Pussycat Dolls on his iPod

Competitive mindset: "You can have a lovely steak, but if you don't present it in the right way, nobody wants it."

Cheer him on: July 18th and 19th at Northwestern University's Welsh-Ryan Arena (1501 Central St., Evanston).



PHOTOGRAPHY: KATRINA WITTKAMP