

# DELANEY Sponsors Parapan America Athlete

December 2, 2011

Last Christmas Delaney had the pleasure of meeting a delightful young lady named Melissa Middleton and her mother Angela through Delaney's annual Christmas Adoption program. Melissa is intellectually challenged and her mother Angela was battling cancer for the second time. This precious family was facing some difficult months, so we decided to adopt them as our Christmas Family last year. As we prepared to deliver Christmas gifts to our new friends, we had no idea that we were meeting a future Para Pan American Athlete.



*Melissa getting ready to show off her skills here at Delaney where she played against our resident table tennis champion Tehvid Dedic.*

The Parapan American Games is a multi-sport event held every four years for athletes with physical disabilities. Melissa was the first American on the Division 11 Team, which is specifically for athletes with an intellectual disorder rather than a physical disability. This past summer Melissa qualified to compete in the 2011 Table Tennis Games that were held in Guadalajara, Mexico last month.

Melissa, who is a very well rounded athlete, has been playing table tennis for only 2 years. "We've done Special Olympics and different local leagues, but she's really gotten so good that she needed a new level of competition," said Angela Middleton, Melissa's mother. "We had to go through a lot of grueling tests and evaluations, but it was worth it for her to have the opportunity to compete."

Neither mother nor daughter had ever been on a plane before they were whisked off to Colorado Springs for a week of training at the Olympic Training Center. They were then flown to Guadalajara, Mexico where Melissa completed the remainder of the training and then competed in the 2011 games. She placed 3rd for her division.

Because of her developing skills and positive attitude, Melissa was deemed "the athlete to watch for" by many spectators. Her hope? The 2015 Games in Toronto, Canada. "I really like competing. It's fun and I got to meet a lot of people from different countries."

During the experience Melissa became the team "mascot" if you will, and anyone who knows her understands why. Her bright eyes and big smile light up any room, but that is only topped by her contagious giggle that brings out the kid in all who are around her.

She will continue to train for Table Tennis around her many other sports which include bowling, baseball, hockey, cheerleading, and dance. But she insists that Table Tennis is her favorite. We put her to the test and invited her to play against our resident champion Tehvid Dedic here at our Delaney warehouse. It was a tough match, but Melissa came out on top. Tehvid has asked Melissa for a rematch very soon, and of course she accepted.



*Melissa (blue) during a match at the 2011 Parapan Am Games in Guadalajara, Mexico.*

We are thrilled to see Melissa mature into such an amazing athlete. Despite having never flown and never being out of the country, Melissa embraced the 2011 Parapan American games with all smiles. "That's half of being an athlete," says her mother. "You have to stick with it, not be scared of things that are new, and have fun."