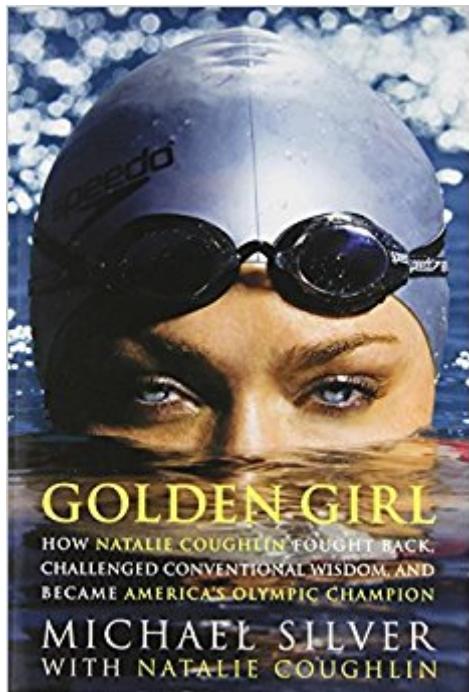


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# Golden Girl



## **Synopsis**

The story of Natalie Coughlin's remarkable battle back from injury and burnout to become America's Golden Girl--a two-time Olympic Gold Medal winner in swimming and the most decorated female athlete at the 2004 Olympics. Five years ago, Natalie Coughlin's promising swimming career was all but extinguished when a devastating shoulder injury ended her dreams for the 2000 Olympics. After becoming, at age 15, the first person ever to qualify for all 14 women's events at the U.S. Nationals, she seemed destined to follow the path of so many other young swimming stars--devoured by an oppressive training schedule. In *Golden Girl*, Sports Illustrated's Michael Silver--coauthor of many bestselling sports memoirs--including Dennis Rodman's, Kurt Warner's, and Jerry Rice's--tells the story of Natalie's remarkable journey back from the brink. With complete access to her family, friends, coaches, teammates, and adversaries, Silver details how she made the crucial choice to train with University of California coach Teri McKeever. Together the two, star and coach, have defied long-standing training methods, forcing the swimming community to rethink the ways in which it treats its talent. An inspirational story of a complex and courageous young athlete, *Golden Girl* is also a fascinating portrait of the fractious world of competitive swimming.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This story of professional swimmer and 2004 Olympic gold medalist Natalie Coughlin personalizes an athlete's strife on her way to the top, her fight against those predicting her fall and her internal struggles against illness, injury and the pressures of the sport. Perhaps "the most talented woman

swimmer of her generation," Coughlin found herself facing questions from the press like, "How does it feel to dishonor your country?" following her harsh defeat in the 2003 FINA World Championship preliminaries-brought on by illness-that immediately preceded her Olympic victory. Tracking her progress from college on, the book has a scenic, nonlinear organization that makes it a bit confusing, but includes fascinating behind-the-scenes stories of Coughlin's coach Teri McKeever, her competition, her actor/football player father and his twin, and the training strategies involved in making a world-class athlete. Rich in detail, this a dramatic and humanizing portrait of an iconic American athlete. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

MICHAEL SILVER, a senior writer at Sports Illustrated, is a highly respected sportswriter and coauthor of several bestselling sports memoirs. He lives in Northern California. NATALIE COUGHLIN has built a reputation as the most versatile, dominant swimmer in the world. Seizing five medals at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens--two gold, two silver, and one bronze--Natalie's performance is considered the best in Olympic history by any American woman.

It's hard to fill a biography when your subject hasn't reached the quarter century mark, so I'm not surprised to find a lot of filler in this tome. You would think Silver - a former Sports Illustrated writer who has co-authored books with Dennis Rodman and Jerry Rice - was getting paid by the word, with the amount of space he dedicates to Natalie's coaches (past and present), teammates, rivals and family. Yes, those things should be present since they're part of Natalie's world and shape her outlook. However, when I repeatedly get several pages about Teri McKeever's recruiting methods, and the individual dramas the Golden Bear swimmers are experiencing I begin to think the title should be pluralized. We're no longer reading about a person or even a swimmer/coach pair; we're getting the life story of the entire aquatic congregation. Natalie becomes a supporting character in what is supposed to be her book, with the notable exceptions of when Silver expresses a somewhat creepy fascination for her (whenever they meet for lattes), or when he's explaining why Natalie is ALWAYS right: Natalie chooses a school her parents don't like: she's right; Natalie feels she was over trained at Terrapins: she's right; Natalie blows up at McKeever over swimming the 200 back; she's right. Natalie breaks the rules and physically strikes out at her teammates during a training exercise: she's right; Natalie nearly gets the team disqualified because of a superstition: she's right. I dare say that if Natalie committed a felony, Silver would detail why she was right. So therein is the problem: the book doesn't focus on Natalie nearly enough, and when it does, it's so worshipful of

everything she does it's off-putting. As a reader, I felt I was drowning in her superiority. I regret reading Golden Girl because the things I like about Natalie - she is eco-conscious, she participated in "Project Believe" (an anti-doping initiative), she competed on Dancing with the Stars - are now overshadowed by Silver's smug portrayal of her. If you are and want to remain a fan of Natalie, I would recommend her twitter feed and facebook posts before I would recommend this book.

It was a little disappointing as I thought the book was more about her coach's life than hers.

When I purchased this book I misread the title and thought it would be more of Natalie Coughlin and an autobiography. Instead it is spread amongst many issues, including Natalie's upbringing as well as some other major swimmers she encounters and the coaches as well. As a former swimmer I usually read through these books in a day, this one took me a couple of plane rides where I was forced to read something. It wasn't available at my public library which is why I bought it. I wouldn't suggest buying it though. But it did give some good insight into several different aspects into Natalie and her swimming career just not as specific as I thought it would be, such as in Amanda Beard's memoir.

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I purchased this book to find out about Natalie's swimming career and how she was able to achieve success in swimming and her Olympic accomplishments. Instead I found the writer, Michael Silver, writing more about the coach, McKeever and the other swimmers under McKeever's tutelage. There is not much about Natalie in this book but rather more is written about the others around her. I am extremely disappointed in this book and would not recommend it if you want to read about Natalie's life and swimming career.

The book provides a rare behind-the-scenes look at what it is like to be a national-level coach and swimmer, as well as some of the downsides of the sport. The book was an enjoyable read, written in an engaging storytelling style. I love swimming, and I found it all fascinating. I wish there were more books out there about competitive swimming. However, the book was falsely billed, perhaps in an effort to boost sales, as a Natalie Coughlin biography. What it really was about was the Cal swimming program and Coach Teri Keever -- a topic that is well worth the ink, but it's not what buyers of the book were led to expect. A true Natalie Coughlin biography would have included

interviews from her parents, siblings, boyfriend and former coaches. There were some quotes from her teammates, but even those were too few. It would have been nice to have more on-the-scene reporting from practices and meets rather than after-the-fact summaries. On the plus side, Mr. Silver covered the important issue of overtraining in young swimmers, as well as pressures for young female swimmers to stay thin. He shows why so many swimmers burn out by the time they get to college, and discusses some alternative training methods that are yielding great success. I wish that he or someone would write a more ambitious book about the world of elite competitive swimming. It's a great sport, and there is much more to be said. Whether the book is about an Olympian, a successful and inspiring coach such as Ms. Keever, or about training techniques, bring it on. I would like to read a book that takes a deeper dive into one of these topics.

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