

THE GREAT BALTIMORE SPORTS DEBATE

We're back. Monday is no longer only known as the start of the work week — it's also the day when Examiner sports editor Jon Gallo and staff writer Matt Palmer go one-on-one in another edition of "The Great Baltimore Sports Debate."

Last week, we told you who are the 10 best athletes with ties to the Baltimore area. Now, we're going to tell you which athletes under the age of 25 with ties to Baltimore City or its five neighboring counties — Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford and Howard — will be tomorrow's icons.

JON GALLO'S TOP 10

1. MICHAEL PHELPS, Swimming, 22: He owns six Olympic gold medals and numerous world records. Here's why I'm right and Palmer's wrong: In 10 years, Phelps will be nationally known as the greatest swimmer of all-time. Will Suggs be considered the best linebacker of all-time? No chance. As good as Suggs is, when someone says "linebacker" in Baltimore, who is going to come to mind first: Ray Lewis or Suggs?

2. TRAVIS PASTRANA, Extreme Sports, 23: One reader last week told me I should be out of a job after I put the motocross superstar on last week's list. Face it, Baltimore's had a lot of great football, basketball and baseball players, but no one has ever been as fearless and athletic than this kid from Annapolis.

3. TERRELL SUGGS, Ravens linebacker, 24: Two-time Pro Bowler and former AFC Rookie of the Year is just now entering his prime. He's great — just not great enough to top this kind of list, unless your name is Matt Palmer, who needed confirmation Peyton Manning was ineligible for this list.

4. KATIE HOFF, Swimming, 18: She won the 200-meter individual medley in record-breaking fashion at this year's World Championships. She's the only one who could rival Phelps' medal count at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

5. KIMMIE MEISSNER, Figure skating, 17: Palmer saw the U.S. champion's last name included the letters "M," "I" and "N" and immediately began dreaming of his boy, Peyton Manning.

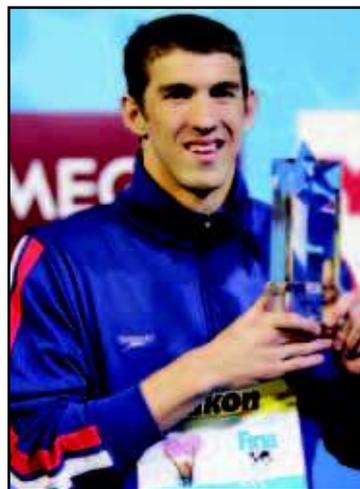
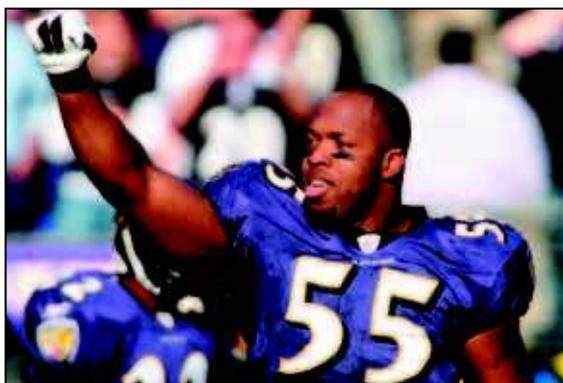
6. MARAH STRICKLAND, Basketball, 19: If you want to see the University of Maryland-bound forward in four years, go to D.C. — it's the closest city with a WNBA team.

7. FELICIA LEE, Swimming, 15: I do not own stock in the North Baltimore Aquatic Club, though three of my top-seven call it home. Palmer has probably never heard of Lee, but she'll be huge after medalling at next year's Olympics.

8. CARMELO ANTHONY, Denver Nuggets forward, 23: Considering he's a former NCAA champion, an NBA All-Star and member of the national team, I don't know how much bigger he can get. But then I got scared that I left him off the list, he'd come after me like I was the Knicks' Mardy Collins.

9. TYLER HIBBS, Arundel High School pitcher, 17: Matt, I see your Nick Markakis and I'll raise you Hibbs. In 10 years, I'll be the one claiming the pot.

10. MATTHEW CENTROWITZ, Distance runner, 17: *Note to Palmer:* If you are on your best behavior for the next few years, I'll talk to management about sending you to London to cover the recent Broadneck High graduate at the 2012 Olympics.



Kimme Meissner, center, is one of Baltimore's biggest rising stars at age 17. Surrounding (clockwise from upper left) her are: Terrell Suggs, Joey Hornish, Michael Phelps, Katie Hoff, Travis Pastrana, Carmelo Anthony and Matthew Centrowitz.

— Photos by Kristine Buls; Chris Ammann; Getty Images



MATT PALMER'S TOP 10

1. TERRELL SUGGS, Ravens linebacker, 24: Suggs is a two-time Pro Bowler who is a marketing bonanza waiting to happen. He's fearsome (40 sacks in four seasons), fun and just now scratching the surface. This season will be a contract year. Ozzie Newsome, pay this man.

2. KIMMIE MEISSNER, Figure Skating, 17: Fallston gem has already won a World Championship and is beloved up and down Route 24. America loves ice skaters, and if she wins gold at the 2010 Olympics, she could be the most famous Baltimore-area athlete ever. Yes, Gallo, ice skating is a sport.

3. MICHAEL PHELPS, Swimming, 22: Last week, he was No. 5 on the all-time greatest athletes with Baltimore ties. What gives? He's already the best in the world. Even if you don't like swimming, there's no denying that he's a once-in-a-lifetime athlete.

4. DEMETRIUS WILLIAMS, Ravens wide receiver, 24: This 2006 fourth-round pick was a steal. He's the shocker on this list, too. *Write this down, Gallo:* Williams will be one of this generation's best deep threats.

5. NICK MARKAKIS, Orioles right fielder, 23: Internet message boards refer to him as "Hall of Fame Markakis" just two seasons into his career. The question is: Can he become a perennial All-Star? He might be the most watched and debated young star in town. This just in: Gallo doesn't have an Oriole on his list.

6. MARK CLAYTON, Ravens wide receiver, 24: Clayton could be the Gary Clark of his era. He's not afraid to catch the ball anywhere on the field. A month away from turning 25, Clayton is also the model of leadership on and off the field.

7. CARMELO ANTHONY, Denver Nuggets forward, 23: Sorry, Carmelo, we have to snitch on you. As an NBA All-Star, you're an inspiration for a generation of young men trying to get out of tough situations. That's a heavy burden, but one you're fully capable of carrying.

8. KATIE HOFF, Swimming, 18: Hoff, from the same North Baltimore Aquatic Club as Phelps, could be the female version of him next summer in Beijing. Get on the bandwagon, Baltimore.

9. MATTHEW CENTROWITZ, Distance runner, 17: Centrowitz's father was an Olympian and Matthew seems destined for the same fate. He is breaking national records with ease.

10. JOEY "JETT" HORNISH, Skateboarding, 9: Anyone else getting creeped out by Gallo's Travis Pastrana obsession? "Jett" is a pint-sized daredevil from Towson who could follow Dundalk's Bucky Lasek's footsteps with championship gold.