

# Jeremy Lin Won't Be an Olympian. At Least Not for Team USA

*There won't be any Linsanity at this year's Olympics — unless the rising NBA star decides to switch sides.*

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ADAM HUNGER / REUTERS

*New York Knicks point guard Jeremy Lin looks on against the Dallas Mavericks in the second half of their NBA basketball game at Madison Square Garden in New York, on February 19, 2012.*

In many ways, Jeremy Lin would be a model Olympian. His appeal crosses national borders. By all accounts, he's a smart, solid citizen off the court. He holds up every Olympic ideal imaginable.

But if you're thinking that sustained NBA excellence could earn Lin a trip to London as part of the U.S. Olympic basketball team, think again.

Sure, Lin has attracted the attention of Jerry Colangelo, the former Phoenix Suns owner who runs USA Basketball. On Monday night, in fact, Colangelo and USA head coach Mike Krzyzewski discussed Lin in a phone conversation. But Colangelo is making things clear. "There's such a thing as paying dues," Colangelo tells TIME, regarding Lin.

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Since taking over Team USA in 2005, Colangelo has worked to build a true national-team program for the Olympics and World Championships, instead of cobbling together a hodgepodge of NBA players a few weeks before the Olympics and expecting a gold medal. (Such disorganization contributed to the team's embarrassing performance at the 2004 Olympics, when the U.S. won a bronze while suffering losses to Puerto Rico, Lithuania and Argentina). Of the 19 current finalists for the 12 Olympic spots, all but Blake Griffin of the Los Angeles Clippers and LaMarcus Aldridge of the Portland Trail Blazers either played in the 2008 Olympics (when the U.S. won gold) or the 2010 World Championships (when the U.S. also finished first). Griffin was injured in the run-up to the 2010 worlds, and Aldridge has been in a Team USA camp before: he was a member of the "select" team that competed against the senior Olympic squad in tune-ups before Beijing.

"One of the things I've said is that people who get involved build equity," says Colangelo. "It's hard [for Lin] to go from A to Z in one quick swoop and maintain the credibility of what you've put in place in the way of infrastructure." (Colangelo originally picked 20 finalists, but Clippers point guard Chauncey Billups is out for the season with a torn Achilles tendon. Colangelo says he will not be replaced.)

Colangelo says that if Lin keeps playing at a high level, he'll very likely receive an invite to join the U.S. select team, which acts as a kind of indoctrination into the Olympic program for younger players. But what if Lin maintains this MVP-level production? During New York's 8-2 run with Lin directing the offense, he is averaging 24.6 points per game and 9.2 assists per game. If this continues as we inch closer to the Olympics, Colangelo will hear calls to put Lin on the team, despite any hours a Team USA member has clocked. And despite the team's existing talent at point guard — including Chris Paul, 2011 NBA MVP Derrick Rose, and Deron Williams, who scored 38 points against Lin and the Knicks Monday night. Lin's All-American story is just too irresistible.

**(PHOTOS: New York Knicks' Jeremy Lin in Action)**

Colangelo, however, says he won't be swayed by public opinion, or even the remote possibility of China taking him away. Lin's maternal grandmother is from mainland China, and Xinhua, the state news agency, has already called on Lin to

renounce his U.S. citizenship and suit up for the Chinese team. (China does not allow dual citizenship. Lin's parents are from Taiwan, but the Taiwanese team cannot qualify for the London Games).

Yes, it would seem outlandish for Lin to join the Chinese team. "Renouncing citizenship has serious ramifications," says Colleen Caden, an immigration lawyer who has advised foreign NBA players on matters of visas, green cards and the like. "It can restrict your ability to live and work in the United States, and travel to other countries." Caden also emphasized that voluntarily renouncing citizenship is an act that is considered to be irrevocable and cannot be canceled or set aside without a successful judicial or administrative appeal. It should not be taken lightly.

But Lin shouldn't dismiss any China offer, says J.R. Holden, a Pittsburgh native who starred at Bucknell University in the late 1990s and played for the Russian national team at the Beijing Olympics. (Holden was a successful pro player in Russia.) "You've got to think about the now, and live in the moment, and enjoy the moment," says Holden, who wrote a memoir about his Russian experience, *Blessed Footsteps*. "If I were Jeremy Lin, I'd go to China. Take advantage of it."

Holden brings up a strong point. Colangelo wants a national program where players build a rapport over many years. That formula has worked for countries like Spain and Argentina. It has worked for the U.S. since Colangelo took over. So if players like Paul and Williams and Rose stick with the program into the next Olympics, when will a spot open up for Lin? And if you're Lin, do you figure there's any guarantee you can sustain this production over the next few years and beyond?

Do you want to capitalize on your appeal, and cement your hero status in the Chinese market, where every multi-national corporation is clamoring for a presence? Lin would seem to have a path to instant riches. Holden did not have to give up his U.S. citizenship to play for Russia. But he doesn't think that issue should stop Lin. "Come on, he went to Harvard," Holden says. "They're not going to kick him out of the States. That guy can always come back." The U.S. government could look favorably on Lin's appeal. He wanted to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to participate in an event that promotes global unity.

**(PHOTOS: The Rise of Jeremy Lin)**

Lin is tight with Yao Ming – he has said he speaks to Yao after every game – and one international basketball expert, Tony Ronzone, says Yao will be more involved with organizing the national team. Ronzone, the former Minnesota Timberwolves assistant GM who serves as a scout for USA Basketball, expects China, which needs a point guard, to make a real play for Lin. (Through a Knicks spokesman, Lin tells TIME that Chinese officials have not personally contacted him about playing on the country's Olympic team. Lin says he hasn't thought about the Olympics, and is doing his best to stay focused on the current season).

Yes, it's still a long shot, but holy global affairs metaphor: imagine the uproar if the U.S. loses Linsanity to China, American's biggest creditor and an emerging superpower. It would be deafening. However, don't expect Lin to leverage any China invite for a spot on this year's U.S. team. Colangelo is resolute. Says Colangelo: "I'm not in a defensive situation with China."

Lin might pass on playing for China. But in London, he won't be on team USA.