

Paralympian
**MALLORY
WEGGEMANN**

Our Little



an make a difference
age the world.



Miracle,

AFTER A LONG IVF JOURNEY, PARALYMPIC SWIMMER AND GOLD MEDALIST MALLORY WEGGEMANN AND HER HUSBAND, JAY SNYDER, WELCOME THEIR FIRST BABY, CHARLOTTE ANN SNYDER: "SHE FOUGHT HARD TO JOIN US IN THIS WORLD"

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Lots of Love

"Everything in your mommy and daddy's life is going to take longer to do because we just can't stop staring at you!" says Weggemann to Charlotte (at home in Egan, Minn.). Inset: With Jay and Charlotte.



Paralympic swimmer Mallory Weggemann locked eyes with her husband, Jay Snyder, in the operating room as he sang their favorite song, *Beautiful Day* by Josh Radin. They'd arrived at the hospital two days earlier to induce labor, and now, on March 16—following a failed epidural, a spinal tap and an emergency C-section—their dream of having a baby was finally about to come true. At 3:31 a.m., Charlotte Ann Snyder came into the world, and minutes later the nurse placed the 7-lb. newborn into her mother's arms. "We felt our heart expand beyond what we ever thought imaginable," says Weggemann, 34. "It was magical."

Indeed it was the happiest of endings following an 18-month IVF journey that took the couple through 707 injections, two ovarian stimulation cycles, two egg retrievals, two months of supplemental hormone treatment for suspected endometriosis and two embryo transfers. Now, with everyone home and healthy, Weggemann and Snyder, 40, are sharing their baby joy to support and inspire other families going through IVF and erase the stigma around mothers with disabilities. "Young women in wheelchairs need to know that motherhood is possible," says Weggemann, a three-time Paralympic gold medal winner who became paralyzed from the waist down at age 18 after an epidural injection went wrong. "When I look at our sweet little miracle, who fought so hard to join us in this world, I see every ounce of love Jay and I put into protecting our dream and our fight to grow our family."

From the time they first met in 2011—Snyder was a sports agent, and Weggemann was his client—they both knew they wanted a family. But there were worries: Weggemann thought her spinal cord injury and paralysis might impact her ability to conceive, and Snyder had suffered a childhood medical condition that likely left him infertile.



Journey to Joy

1. "Charlotte was a name we gravitated to for years," says Jay. 2. Weggemann received 707 hormone injections (shown) over 18 months of IVF treatments.

3. "I want to raise awareness that parenting with a disability can be done," says Weggemann, taking care of Charlotte.

They married in 2016 and started exploring family planning in the fall of 2021—following the Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games, where Weggemann won gold in the women's 200m individual medley. Back home in Eagan, Minn., they learned that Weggemann could conceive, while tests confirmed Snyder's male-factor infertility. They decided to proceed with IVF and share the journey with their fans and followers to raise awareness about male-factor infertility and support mothers with disabilities. "We don't celebrate women with disabilities as good mothers," says Weggemann, who has been an outspoken advocate for disability rights throughout her 14-year athletic career.

Despite several challenges over the next few months—including an invasive procedure called

An ATHLETE & a MOM



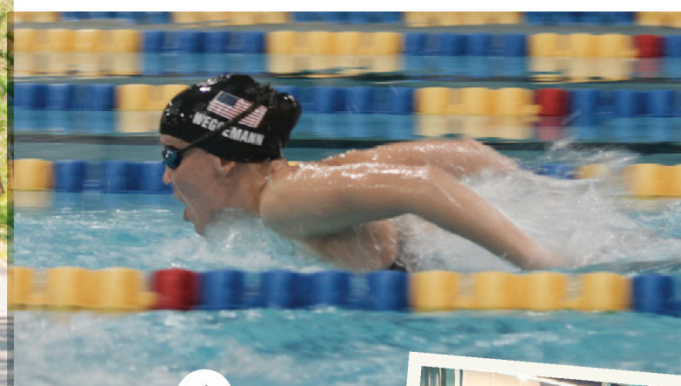
Three-Time Gold Medalist

Weggemann won her third gold medal in the women's 200m individual medley at the Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games in August 2021.



Sharing Good News

"We are absolutely overjoyed," wrote Weggemann in her pregnancy announcement on Aug. 12, 2022.



Breaking Barriers

"Female athletes should have the option to continue their careers through parenthood," says Weggemann (above and right, at the Paralympic Nationals in December 2022.)





microTESE to collect sperm from Snyder and an additional two-month hormonal treatment cycle for Weggemann after doctors suspected she might have endometriosis—the couple were thrilled to wind up with two healthy, fertilized embryos. Through it all Weggemann continued to compete, juggling her IVF cycles and hormone shots with her training regimen—and racing in the Para Swimming World Series in April 2022, where she qualified for her fourth World Championship team. “I made this team while simultaneously fighting through six months of IVF,” she wrote on Instagram, “and while literally being in the midst of prep for our frozen embryo transfer.”

‘We just constantly said, “Whatever it takes to keep her and me healthy”’

— MALLORY WEGGEMANN

That same month, the couple’s first transfer failed (“It rocked us to the core,” says Jay), but their second try in July proved successful. “We were over the moon!” says Weggemann, who had a smooth pregnancy throughout and even raced at the 2022 U.S. Paralympic Swimming Nationals in December at 26 weeks. Adds Jay: “Hearing the heartbeat was truly a miracle.”

The baby’s birth, however, proved challenging. A failed epidural—which Weggemann needed to avoid potential complications due to her paralysis (“The idea of facing that triggered emotions and flashbacks I haven’t had in years”)—led to severe contractions and sharp pains in her back and stomach. That, in turn, put her at risk for autonomic dysreflexia, a potentially life-threatening condition that causes an overreaction in the nervous system. “I started uncontrollably throwing up because of my anxiety around my trauma,” she says. “There were so many factors that were just too similar to the day I was paralyzed.” With the baby’s heart rate increasing, doctors advised a C-section. “They wiped Charlotte off, and we heard her scream, and we both lost it,” says Snyder.

Three days later they brought their baby girl home, where everything has since fallen comfortably into place for the new family of three. “She’s a rock star,” says Weggemann, who began breastfeeding in the hospital. “She literally latched on right away.” While Weggemann and Snyder would love to give Charlotte a sibling, they’re also factoring in the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games and training as a new mom. “I fundamentally believe I can be the best mom and the best athlete possible, come August 29, 2024,” says Weggemann. “Parenting as a mom with a spinal cord injury is different, but in a really beautiful way,” she adds. “Jay and I both went through a lot. But looking at Charlotte now, we’d do all of it all over again.” ●

