

**Pick Your NPR Station**

There are at least three stations nearby



LIVE RADIO

SHOWS



## SPORTS

# USA Gymnastics Announces New CEO, The Fourth In Less Than 2 Years

LISTEN · 4:18

QUEUE

Download

Transcript

February 19, 2019 · 5:07 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered

ALEXANDRA STARR

USA Gymnastics has hired a new CEO: the embattled organization's fourth leader in the past two years. The organization is trying to get beyond a widening sexual abuse scandal.

ARI SHAPIRO, HOST:

Today, USA Gymnastics named its fourth CEO in less than two years. The new leader of USA Gymnastics is Li Li Leung. She will be leaving a job as an executive with the NBA to take the role. She's also a former collegiate gymnast. Reporter Alexandra Starr joins us to talk about her appointment. Hi there.

ALEXANDRA STARR, BYLINE: Hi.

SHAPIRO: So USA Gymnastics has pretty much been in freefall since news broke in 2016 that former team doctor Larry Nassar had molested hundreds of athletes. He's now behind bars for life. So where do things stand at USA Gymnastics today?

STARR: Things have been bad. The organization has been leaderless for months. In the fall, the U.S. Olympic Committee started the process of decertification. That

basically meant that USA Gymnastics would no longer be the organization overseeing the sport. And then 2 1/2 months ago, USA Gymnastics declared bankruptcy.

SHAPIRO: That is quite a string of events. What impact did the bankruptcy have?

STARR: It put the dozens of lawsuits that had been filed against the organization on ice, and it also put a halt to the U.S. Olympic Committee's effort to decertify USA Gymnastics. But now the head of the U.S. Olympic Committee says she's very hopeful Leung can turn things around. So it looks like the organization is going to get another chance.

SHAPIRO: You have been covering USA Gymnastics in depth. Do you think she can turn things around?

STARR: She's certainly saying the right things. This is what she said on a press call today.

(SOUNDBITE OF PRESS CALL)

LI LI LEUNG: I have bled. I have sweated. I have cried alongside my teammates, alongside other gymnasts. And it breaks my heart to see the state that the sport is in today, and that is why I stepped forward.

STARR: She says she wants USA Gymnastics to be more athlete-centric. And she also pointed to settling lawsuits with Larry Nassar's survivors as one of her top priorities. All that said, the attorney representing most of those survivors was scathing about her appointment, so I - we can expect more conflict ahead.

SHAPIRO: So that's what the attorney representing the survivors said. Has there been much reaction from the survivors themselves, the people who were abused by Larry Nassar?

STARR: Some have been coming forward and saying that they were not consulted on this appointment. And they seem to be arguing at this point that they're concerned that she is not going to be a real agent of change.

SHAPIRO: Do you think she might have more success than the string of executives who have been cycling through this position?

STARR: Look. I think she is better prepared for this job than the last two people we've seen. The last CEO, former Congresswoman Mary Bono, lasted less than a week in the job (laughter). So I think she's going to improve on those performances. At the same time, the organization has been in such disarray for so long, and reforming it is going to be such a heavy lift. We'll have to see if anyone can turn this around. So we'll be watching as we see how she moves forward as we move into, you know, Olympic preparation time.

SHAPIRO: Just to ask a bigger picture question here, there will be gymnasts in the United States competing at international levels whether or not USA Gymnastics as an organization survives. Why is it so important for somebody - anyone - to turn this organization around?

STARR: That's a good question, Ari. I mean, something that is really remarkable is how extraordinary the women's gymnastics team is. You know, they've just won - look at them. You know, they've won gold medal after gold medal. They cleaned up at the world championships last year. At the same time, this so-called national governing body, these - USA Gymnastics plays a role in developing a pipeline and staging these tournaments and getting people together for these camps. So it's not stuff we necessarily see, but it is important work. And I think people who are advocates for the sport really do want to see this organization turn around.

SHAPIRO: That's reporter Alexandra Starr. Thank you very much.

STARR: Thank you.

*Copyright © 2019 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website terms of use and permissions pages at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) for further information.*

*NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by Verb8tm, Inc., an NPR contractor, and produced using a proprietary transcription process developed with NPR. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Accuracy and availability may vary. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.*