



Sheldon Battle was an All-American at Kansas in both the discus and the shot. Submitted photo

Battle Priming For Olympic Shot

By Scott Kindberg, skindberg@post-journal.com

12/23/2007 - Attempting to select the best athlete who has ever walked the halls at Jamestown High School is a daunting, and dangerous, task.

So, in the interest of time, and safety, we'll avoid going anywhere near the "Who's No. 1?" debate.

But, even with that disclaimer, there should be little doubt who would be on the short list of all-time Red Raider greats.

Sheldon Battle, Class of 2001, has few peers.

"In my opinion," said Jim Painter, who has coached and taught at JHS for 40 years, "he's one of the best, if not the best, that I've ever had the pleasure of working with."

Noted JHS athletic director Ben Drake: "The level to which he has climbed is unbelievable."

Consider: Battle routinely was among the best age-group shot and discus throwers in the nation, traveling the country to Junior Olympic meets while a member of the Chautauqua Striders.

"He was always there, always at practice, always at the regional meets," said David Reinhardt, the Striders' program director. "When you needed him to be in the lobby to catch the bus he was always there. He was very committed to it. He had the quiet side to him, but he was like a gentle giant. You just expected big things from him."

In high school, Battle broke JHS records in the discus (192-10) and the shot (59-8), and won three state championships (two discus, one shot).

"He was just a standout from the get-go," Painter said. "He was focused and he knew what he wanted to do. He was one of those types of kids who took everything you said to heart, and he'd do everything he could. He always asked the right questions."

On the gridiron, Battle was a first-team all-state selection and the Section 6 Defensive Player of the Year as a senior when he helped Jamestown claim the 2000 Class AA championship. Repeated concussions curtailed his promising football career, but Painter believes the sky would have been the limit for Battle in that sport, too.

"It sounds stupid," said Painter, who was Battle's weights coach and his junior varsity football coach at JHS, "but I think he could have been a pro football player. He had everything going for him."

In two years at Mesa (Ariz.) Community College, Battle was the 2004 NJCAA champion in both the shot and the discus, earning All-American honors in both.

In two years at the University of Kansas, he earned All-American accolades in the shot, both indoors and outdoors. His throw of 68-81/2 at the 2005 U.S. Outdoor Championships — the 10th best throw in the world that year — is a school record that still stands. To honor his accomplishments, Battle was prominently featured in a display at the school's Booth Family Hall of Athletics in Lawrence, Kan.

"He's the greatest shot putter that has ever walked through the door at Kansas," said Doug Reynolds, formerly the Jayhawks' throws coach and now an assistant at the University of Kentucky, "and there have been some great ones."

Such recognition makes the humble Battle a little uncomfortable, but he does acknowledge, "I'm proud of the things I've done."

But Battle, now 24, has one final entry that he would like to add to his sterling resume — Olympic athlete.

"I feel like it's there," he said.

A financial boost might make that a reality sooner than later. For while the U.S. Olympic Trials aren't for another six months,

The Post-Journal

Battle has plenty of training to do between now and then. He also has bills to pay.

It's a dilemma, and juggling act, that he wrestles with every day.

Twenty-five hours a week, Battle fills the ice machines, mops the floor and makes sandwiches at Jimmy John's, a sub shop that is a stone's throw from the University of Kentucky campus in Lexington.

He makes \$7 an hour.

Such is the life of a track and field athlete trying to realize a lifelong dream. Long on ambition, but short on cash, he burns the figurative candle at both ends.

"You talk about inspiration and perspiration," said former JHS varsity football coach Wally Huckno. " ... It's a hell of a commitment for a young man who wants to reach the pinnacle, which the Olympics are."

"You get wide-eyed," Battle admitted by phone recently. "I knew it wasn't going to be the easiest. The last two years I haven't succeeded like I should have."

It appears, however, that he is making the necessary changes to see that he gets back near the top of the throwing world. In fact, Battle has been in Lexington since late spring after deciding to reunite with Reynolds. For nearly four hours a day, Battle works out under Reynolds' watchful eye. The goal is to be ready to throw his absolute best when the Olympic Trials are held in Eugene, Ore., this summer.

Getting to that point — and, hopefully, earning a berth on the U.S. team that will compete in Beijing — will be the challenge.

In 2005, Battle was among the top shot putters in the nation, finishing second at the NCAA Championships and fourth at the U.S. Nationals with that school-record toss of 68-81/2 and just missing a chance to compete at the World Championships.

Soon after, Reynolds left Lawrence for Lexington. Battle, meanwhile, went into his senior year with a new coach, who had an entirely different training philosophy than Reynolds, one that was built on brute strength. At his peak, Battle tipped the scales at 290 pounds and was strong as an ox, but he never was able to match his performances of 2005 because, he says, he wasn't as quick or as explosive.

"I was excited to get back to Doug," said Battle, who now weighs about 270 pounds. "He was a breath of fresh air."

Battle, the son of Kristen Rogers and Fred Battle, both of Jamestown, hopes that his work will pay off with a throw of 70 feet at the trials.

"If you hit 70 feet at that meet you have a realistic chance of making (the Olympic team)," he said. "The 70-foot mark is the mark where you're going to be in the hunt for those three (qualifying) spots. ... It's a realistic goal and not a long shot by any means."

Reynolds agrees. "I certainly think he's capable of that," he said. "I think he showed that in 2005. To be honest with you, he brings more to the table than he did at that point physically. Technically, we're a long way away."

But, Reynolds maintains, the goal is to have Battle primed and ready four to six weeks before the Olympic Trials.

"It's always been the slow and steady approach," Reynolds said. "We don't want to force anything and we don't want to be ready at any certain time other than (for the trials)."

That's where the training is so important. That's why having to work while training is so difficult. That's why Battle could use some financial help.

Huckno has been part of the greater Jamestown community for more than 45 years as a teacher, coach, athletic director and Chautauqua County legislator.

That experience has taught him that the area consists of "very, very generous people."

Now, Huckno maintains, it's time for them to step up and help give a young man a chance to realize his Olympic dream.

"I issue a challenge to the coaches and people who support the world of athletics to open their checkbooks (to support Battle)," he said. "What can be a better message at Christmas. It's better to give than to receive. To me, that's the easy part. He's doing the hard work."