



## Throws Wannabe

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I've offered help to Lancaster Throws coach, George Rak over the past two years to help promote the Rock n' Roll Throw Off (RNRTTO) at the Lancaster High School Field House by putting together a press release to send to the various media outlets. Last year's event featured Olympian A. J. Krueger and a few other national and Olympic caliber throwers. This year, schedule conflicts prevented these same individuals from attending so the emphasis was to tout the local scholastic throwers and pull in some other sections' student-athletes as well. The registration levels indicated the second annual event would be a success with over 45 throwers signed up.

Now, I've always been enamored, intrigued, and curious..., with the whole art of throwing and the community it fosters at the scholastic level thanks to the area coaches. I've often wondered how I would do if I had the chance to throw...hmmm, there's a masters category here. Well, some quick research on the 'net, an email to George asking if he thought I would kill myself, a positive response, online registration and I was in!

The big day finally comes along and after spending the morning at the indoor meet held that morning, I roar home to grab some "training food", catch a quick power nap and get my throwing gear together. I arrive at the field house and the music is blaring as promised. One of the Lancaster throwers must be a Jimmi Hendrix fan as he played Hendrix's version of the Star Spangled Banner complete with reverberation. Given the theme of the event, my age and the air of nostalgia, I thought it was great! I only wish I had his name to give him the props for his performance.

Now, I was doing what I usually do at these events and that was taking the photos of the competitors, coaches and spectators but I was also trying to interrogate anyone who would talk to me about technique, form, position or even a prayer to the Throwing Gods...I realized I needed all the help I could get. I have to admit, when some of the kids, coaches or parents found out I was competing, there was this smile that came across their faces. I didn't know if it was because they thought it was a something cool for me to do or they were smiling because they were thinking, "boy, he doesn't know what he's getting into."

The time came to meet my competition (and to ask whether I could use their shot implements) who all have thrown the shot before either as high school/collegiate athletes or who later picked it up later in life and have competed on a semi-regular basis. Speaking with one of the gentlemen, Ray, he mentioned that I should take up the event and try to qualify for the Empire Games this summer in Buffalo. He said I could bump up one age group (55-59) and there could be a chance to earn some "serious hardware" as he put it. I was thinking, "yeah, plates and screws in my arms and shoulder!"

What was interesting during this was Melissa Kurzdorfer had followed me over to where I was meeting the other "masters" and when she got her opportunity asked if she could use my camera to take photos of the masters competition. I hesitated a bit, not out of concern, but thought it would be an interesting reversal of fortune so to speak. "Yeah, why not?" I said. I think her reaction was only matched by her elation when she broke the shot put record about a ½ hour later.

So, the time finally comes to begin warming up and I figured anymore stretching wasn't going to do me any good anyway so I may as well pick up one of these "balls" and see what happens. OK, tuck shot under the chin, hold it thumbs down,...wait a minute, am I going to do that "hop thing", discus spin (no, no, bad knees, forget that one) or being it is the first time, just stand there at the edge of the ring and just throw it and see if you come out of it without throwing my back out. I chose the latter...hmmm, not bad, heavier than I thought but not bad.

OK, now after a few, I feel more comfortable with how I'm positioning the shot in my hand and throw, now what do I do with my legs? No wait, Tubbs told me to get my hips out front first and then throw...or was that throw first and then throw the hips out...uggghh, I think I threw my hip out!

Enough "practice", I'll blow any chance of competing if I tire myself out warming up...Ok, let's get the show on the road. Friendly banter among the "old guys", some last minute instructions from WNY Official/ referee Mike Bordonaro and then everyone gets a serious expression on their faces...I thought this was for fun guys?

I'm throwing 5 out of 6 so I get a chance to measure up what I'm up against and get to watch the "old pros" toss this thing in earnest. Damn, not bad, they look like they know what they're doing! My name is called and I saunter up to the ring, I hear Mike snickering, look up and see George grinning at me... Now I know how Alice felt when she met the Cheshire Cat! Get them out of your head there Bill, get yourself set...ok, ok, set, here we go....argggh! Hey, not bad!

Shame that in admiration of my first ever throw in competition I step out the front of the circle instead of out the back as required. "FOUL!" screams Mike. "WHAT!?" I scream. One of the other master throwers comes over to Mike and feigns kicking sand on his feet like a baseball manager does to an umpire. I should have known...I've watched how many throwers over the past few years and I know the rule so what do I do. Another thing to remember.

To make a long story longer, I get five more attempts, Mike is screaming "Back, back, back, back" after each one of my throws that I wondered if it was Chris "Boomer" Berman from ESPN officiating. Meanwhile after one throw George comes up and holds his hand up with his arm at 90 degrees and says, "What's behind my hand?" Being the smart Alec I am I said, "Well, I see my wife, Mike Kurzdorfer and a bunch of your throwers lying on the mats."

"No you dummy, there's nothing behind my hand", George says.

Now he puts his hand in front of his chest with his elbow up and out and asks "Now, what's behind my hand?"

Not wanting to push my luck, I said, "Your chest." George responds, "Yes! And that's where you should be throwing from. It's an unnatural throwing motion so that's what you've got to learn." Nothing like a 54 year old feeling like he just got grounded.

Well, the competition mercifully comes to an end with my best being 30' ½" so I reached my goal of going over thirty feet. Problem was that one of my fellow masters who is 74 years old; beat me like a drum by 2 feet! Show off!

I found out two things...throwing the shot put (and I'm sure the discus and weight throw) are very much like playing golf. There's so much to think about from a technique standpoint, arm position, throwing motion, extension, follow through, leg and hip position and that damn exit requirement. Oh yeah, add some strength conditioning because 13 pounds is a lot heavier when you're trying to throw it (unnaturally). The second thing I learned is that I am so out of shape but this is a great motivation to get back in shape. Maybe the Empire games is something to shoot for if not just for the sake of competing and being part of the throws community.

With my lovely wife in tow, we left the field house not because it was a long day already but quite frankly, I didn't want anyone to see me grimacing in pain...my back and shoulder were fine but my knees were killing me...did I really use them to throw?

So on the entire drive home, I'm motioning like I'm throwing from the chest as George directed and thinking about the whole throwing experience and the event itself. I was finally part of something special and in all honesty, didn't embarrass myself as I thought I would. The whole way home and had this big grin on my face.

Now I know why everyone else was smiling and grinning like Cheshire Cats!