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## Under two Olympians' wings, Richotte has flourished

**With Lance Deal and Harold Connolly in his corner, the sky's the limit for Oregon's hammer specialist**

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He's only been throwing the hammer for four years, but what he lacks in experience, newly crowned Pacific-10 Conference Champion Brian Richotte makes up for in determination and diligence. He's honed his craft under the tutelage of the last two American men to medal in the Olympics. And both those men believe that Richotte has it in him to follow in their footsteps.

"Yes, making the Olympics is definitely a reasonable goal for Brian," Oregon throws coach, and 1996 Olympic silver medalist Lance Deal said. "Brian is a great strength and power guy, he has a really good kinesthetic sense, a great feel for the hammer, and he's got the thing that's most important to be a hammer thrower: Some people call it stubbornness, and some people call it tenacity."

Harold Connolly - the gold medal winner at the 1956 Olympic Games - Richotte's former coach from his three years spent at Radford University in Virginia, concurs with Deal's assessment of their protégé's potential.

"Brian's only limitation is what he feels he's capable of doing and his own perseverance," Connolly said. "He's on a quick road to what he wants to achieve - the Olympics. Brian's the right height, he's



strong, he's quick and Lance has got the technique and supplementary training that will help Brian to achieve results.

"He's tenacious. That's what counts."

Between them, Deal and Connolly have been to eight different Olympic Games, hold more than 30 national titles, and have a wealth of experience in the hammer throw spanning more than 50 years. Deal also holds the national record with a 270-9 mark set in 1996.

The two men know talent when they see it, and even though Richotte came to both of them at different stages of his development as a hammer thrower, they both identified a rare tenacity in Richotte that has only become more apparent over the last year.

### **Humble beginnings**

Richotte started out as a high jumper and discus thrower at Royal Oak Shrine Catholic High School, a small school in Berkeley, Mich.

He spent his freshman year of college at the University of Detroit, where he walked on to the track team. Richotte had initially intended to specialize in the decathlon. But his plans changed when he put on some weight during the summer between the end of high school and the start of college, and realized that his new bulk would be more beneficial to him as a thrower.

"I put on muscle really easily, so I decided it'd be best if I just threw," said Richotte, who weighed about 180 pounds at the end of high school, and currently weighs 240 pounds. "I got really into the shot put and the discus and didn't really even do the hammer 'til my first year in college.

"It wasn't something I liked at first, so I kinda struggled with the coach when they wanted me to throw it. But the more I threw it, the more I liked it."

Richotte transferred to Radford University in Virginia where he worked with Radford throws coach Scott Corrado and Connolly. Connolly had no official affiliation with the school, but he volunteered to coach Richotte in tandem with Corrado.

"Both those men were the most influential people in my hammer career," Richotte said. "Scott just has a vested interest in helping people. He didn't care so much how you progressed as an athlete as how you progressed as a person. And as far as Harold's concerned, for a man to be able to come out every day, five days a week, two hours a day, just to help someone on his own voluntarily speaks volumes about the kind of person he is."

For Connolly, helping Richotte was something he did purely in the name of giving back to a sport that has been a big part of his life for a long time.

"I do it because of my own love of the event," Connolly said. "Right now, there's another young man at Radford that I'm going to help, too. If I see the right attitude in a person, I'm not going to charge them anything. I just want to give them all the help I can."

Training with a former Olympian motivated Richotte to keep striving for greater heights.

"Harold kinda put things in perspective for me. A regional qualifying throw was not that good in the grand scheme of things. A 200 throw was not that good, a 70m throw was not that good," Richotte said. "Any time he talks about stories of qualifying for the Olympic team or winning the U.S. championship, it kind of puts perspective on what you've accomplished, and keeps me always looking for that next level."

Under the instruction of the Corrado-Connolly tandem, Richotte steadily improved his throws by about five meters every year. During his third year at Radford, he was ranked sixth among all collegians and 45th in the country.

### **Everything comes together**

When Corrado decided to take a break from coaching at the end of last season, Richotte opted to graduate early and take his hammer career to the next level. He enrolled in Oregon as a graduate student this winter to start training with Deal, whom he hoped would help him further refine his technique.

Initially Richotte struggled to find himself and adapt to his new surroundings.

"I was 2,400 miles from home, I didn't know anyone when I came here, and just getting in the swing of things with grad school, a different coach and getting on the same page took me a long time to get into stride," Richotte said.

But Richotte soon found his niche on the team, and that helped him feel at little more at home in Oregon.

"Now I feel like I know where I belong on the team," he said. "I didn't know how I was going to be received when I came in. But the more I built relationships with people, the more I felt comfortable with who I was on the team."

Richotte has also developed a good relationship with Deal.

"Having Lance as a coach who's thrown 82 meters and knows what it feels like, knows what the training's like, that's the reason why I decided to make the move out here," Richotte said.

Deal helped Richotte to pull together all the little details necessary for success in the hammer throw, and he's tried to look out for Richotte both on and off the track.

"When I got here it took me three months to cook my own meal, I was eating out like three or four times a day, I put on 25 pounds, and Lance set me down and was like, 'You know, we've got to put better gas in the tank.'" Richotte said.

Deal got Richotte to improve his diet, and this translated into more productive practice sessions.

"There were some days when I was eating gross food that I noticed I was just lethargic at practice. Real sluggish," Richotte said. "The biggest difference was having that energy and being able to put solid practice after solid practice together, I think that's a big reason why I've been improving every weekend.

"It's not only the technical change, but the life change."

Richotte had a particularly strong performance at the Pac-10 Championships two weeks ago where he threw a 222-11, which places him eighth among all collegians this year, and vaulted him onto fifth on the all-time Oregon ladder. He's found his momentum and is now gunning to make it to the Olympics by 2012.

Deal believes Richotte's Pac-10 performance is a harbinger of bigger things to come.

"At the Pac-10s, he took every single thing that we'd been working on and he did it on that day. And that's the sign of a true champion," Deal said. "He was a lot of fun to watch on that day because he was out there all by himself doing it.

"In the hammer, you're out there and you've got 18 seconds total to do this thing in three-second chunks. You get six chances of three seconds to do your very best. That's part of the focus and that's when people who are good at it shine. Brian's good at it."

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