

OLYMPIC WEIGHTLIFTER MORGHAN KING ROSE QUICKLY TO THE TOP

SEATTLE: Morghan King was interning as a graphic designer and working at an organic breakfast restaurant in Seattle when she put "real life" on hold to become a weightlifter. Four years later, King is heading to Rio de Janeiro to compete in the Olympics. It's been a rapid rise to the top for the 30-year-old strongwoman. "I gave up my whole other life to pursue weightlifting for the dream of making the Olympics," King said. "Once I put my mind to something, I go after it 110 percent. I was fortunate enough to have the support system to allow me to do that." The 5-foot, 106-pound King is one of only four athletes - three female - representing the

US in weightlifting. Kendrick Farris, Sarah Robles and Jenny Arthur also are going to Brazil. King, who grew up in Redmond, Washington, played soccer at Notre Dame de Namur University, where she received a bachelor's degree in graphic design.

She participated in triathlons after college before a friend of a friend suggested CrossFit. That led her to boyfriend Dean Kruse, who introduced her to weightlifting and has coached her along the way. "I realized that I wanted to be very competitive again and when I decided to get stronger for CrossFit, I found weightlifting and fell in love," King said. King and Kruse moved to Charlotte,

North Carolina, three years ago so she could start training for the Olympics. "I tried 'real life' after I graduated college," she said. "I love that side of myself but I am so passionate about athletics and sports that I always kept coming back to them. I now know that being involved in sports is where I'm supposed to be."

King finished fourth in her first national meet at the 2012 American Open. She then dropped down from the 53-kilogram class to 48 kg and soon qualified for the 2013 International Weightlifting Federations World Championships.

Zygmunt Smalcerz, the resident weightlifting team coach at the US

Olympic training center, saw her perform and invited her to train under him in Colorado Springs, Colorado. So King and Kruse packed their bags and moved again. "There is no way I could have done it without Dean," King said. "He has been with me since the beginning. Without his guidance and passion for the sport, my journey would have been pretty lonely." In 2015, Kruse resumed coaching King under the program guidance of Shahin Nasarinia, a former Iranian weightlifting champion. King qualified for the Olympics by lifting a total of 180 kg - 80 kg snatch and 100 kg clean and jerk - at the US trials in May.

She's excited to make it this far but won't be satisfied coming home empty-handed. "It's my goal to have a medal around my neck," King said. "I know I have the capability to do it." No American weightlifter has brought home a medal since 2000, the first year women took part in the Summer Games. Tara Nott (48 kg) won a gold and Cheryl Haworth (75 kg) earned a bronze that year. US men haven't won a medal since 1984. "We have a very competitive women's team going to Rio," King said. "I think not only myself but all of us girls have the capacity of bringing hardware home. I think that's pretty special." —AP

REIGNING CHAMP UCHIMURA EYES BREAKTHROUGH FOR JAPAN

TOKYO: Kohei Uchimura has nothing left to prove. The only question surrounding the effortlessly elegant 27-year-old is if he is the greatest male gymnast of all time.

Another Olympic all-around title to bookend the one the Japanese captured in London four years ago would settle the debate for now and perhaps for good. Yet Uchimura is far less concerned with adding to his ever-growing collection of personal bling - he's won a record six world championships to go with that Olympic gold - and more focused on helping his country return to the top of the podium. Japan ended a lengthy losing streak to rival China when it triumphed at the 2015 world championships. Uchimura - who isn't ruling out sticking around until the 2020 Olympics back home in Tokyo - would love nothing more than to fill the one hole left on his peerless resume. A few other things to look for when the men's competition in Rio de Janeiro gets underway on Aug 7.

MANRIQUE'S MOMENT

Uchimura's biggest challenge may come from 20-year-old Cuban Manrique Larduet. The powerful Larduet was a revelation at worlds last fall, finishing a surprising second behind Uchimura. Heady territory for a kid from Santiago on the southeastern Cuban coast, a good 500 miles from Havana. Cuba has never won a medal at the Olympics in men's gymnastics, a drought Larduet could end if he can back up his bronze-medal winning performance on high bar at worlds. In an event that can best be described as gymnastics' answer to the Slam Dunk Contest, Larduet's daring, high-flying routine is a wonder.

STEADY SAM

Sam Mikulak has spent most of the last four years as easily the best American gymnast, reeling off four straight national titles with relative ease. Yet he's struggled to make an impact on the international level, his only medal coming as part of the US team that won bronze at the 2014 world championships. The 23-year-old moved to the US Olympic Training Center after graduating from Michigan but continues to be bothered by small mistakes - usually early in a competition - that force him to spend most of the

meet playing catch-up. "It's time for me to show what I can do on the international stage," Mikulak said. "I think if I can go out there with my mind clear, I'll be OK."

LONG TIME COMING

Chris Brooks spent the overwhelming majority of his career pushed just off to the side, whether by injury or just enough mistakes in crucial moments to convince the US national team selection committee to look elsewhere for help. Now the 29-year-old is center stage. Brooks put together a surprising run to a spot on the five-man U.S. squad along with Mikulak, Jake Dalton, Alex Naddour and Danell Leyva (filling in for an injured John Orozco) by finishing second at nationals and Olympic Trials. An alternate on the Olympic team that faded to fifth in London in 2012, Brooks heads to Rio as team captain.

STRUGGLING SUPERPOWER

China's lengthy run at the top officially ended last October when it slipped all the way to third behind Japan and rising Great Britain, signaling an end to the Chinese's once easy dominance. "It's a warning for all of us," Zhang Chenglong said. "Because it's a competition, there are always successes and failures. No one can be the forever winner." Zhang is the only returning member of the 2012 team that won gold in London after five-time Olympic gold-medal winner Zou Kai's late bid to make the team was beset by injury.

DON'T MISS

Great Britain's Louis Smith on pommel horse. The event is 45 seconds of lactic-acid producing agony for most but Smith's powerfully graceful set stands out. While some of his competitors move their hands so quickly it's as if they're racing to get done, Smith takes his time. His athletic swoops from one side to the other are a picture of control.

The 27-year-old began the Brits' rise in international competition when he earned bronze on pommel horse in Beijing, the first Englishman to win an Olympic medal in gymnastics in a century. He picked up a silver on pommels in London, capping a triumph meet for the Brits, who edged the Ukraine for bronze in the team event. — AP



BEIJING: In this Aug. 26, 2015 file photo, Kenya's Julius Yego celebrates after winning the men's javelin at the World Athletics Championships at the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing. Yego wanted to be an athlete, only he couldn't run very fast. That can be a significant setback for a kid growing up in the highlands of western Kenya, where the best distance runners in the pre-eminent distance-running nation are molded. Yego had a different plan to succeed in track and field. With the help of a sharpened stick, an "elastic" right wrist, and, crucially, a selection of YouTube videos that were his coaching manual, he became a javelin world champion instead. — AP

'YOUTUBE MAN' YEGO, KENYA'S SELF-TAUGHT JAVELIN WORLD CHAMP

NAIROBI: Julius Yego wanted to be an athlete, only he couldn't run very fast. That can be a significant setback growing up in the highlands of western Kenya, where the best distance runners in the pre-eminent distance-running nation are molded. When it comes to sport, running is just about all that matters in Kenya.

So Yego had to come up with a different plan to succeed. With the help of a sharpened stick, an "elastic" right wrist, and YouTube videos as a substitute for a coaching manual, he became a javelin world champion instead.

"Javelin is the sport in me, part of my blood," he said. "I can't sprint. I can't compete in the 800 meters or the 100 meters. Javelin is the main talent I had." Yego, a world champion who isn't a distance runner, goes against trends in Kenya and in international track and field in a refreshing way. Forget convention - imagine a Jamaican winning a world title in the 10,000 meters, or an Ethiopian gold medalist in the 100 sprint.

Even that doesn't encapsulate the essence of the journey of a boy from a rural farming village in the Great Rift Valley who practiced with sharpened sticks he cut off trees, and used online videos to teach himself to launch a javelin as far as the best from Scandinavia, Germany and Eastern Europe.

He launched one, a sleek metal one, further than them all last year to win the world championship title in Beijing. When Yego threw 92.72 meters, hurling himself face-first onto the ground as the javelin left that fabulously flexible right hand, he catapulted into the top three best javelin throwers ever. His effort was the eighth furthest in history. Only the great Jan Zelezny (who has six of the top eight throws) and Aki Parviainen have thrown a javelin further.

There isn't another African on that list of leading throws. There isn't another non-European in the top 30. "When I saw the Javelin fly I knew it was a huge, huge, huge throw," Yego said, recalling that effort.

The first Kenyan to win a world title in a field event. An African record. The first man in 14 years to throw more than 92 meters. Only the fifth man ever to top 92 meters. All tremendous achievements, yet it very nearly didn't happen.

In Cheptonon village in the Rift Valley, a young Yego thought he could succeed in javelin, believing he had a gift. "My strength is my hand," he said. "It is flexible and elastic. Very nice."

For years, though, he was the only one who believed it. He got very little help as his career progressed, so he turned instead to the internet. He'd make his way to the closest internet cafe to his village and watch YouTube videos of the great Zelezny, his favorite, and others. Then he'd go home and put into practice what he'd seen. It was still tough. As recently as 2008, Yego, training alone and unnoticed, considered giving up when he was overlooked for the world juniors. "At that point I didn't want to do the javelin because there was no support," he said in an interview with The Associated Press in Kenya. "Support was for the 800 meters ... up to the marathon. They overlooked the field events."

He stuck at it, though, and threw 75 meters in 2010. Encouraged, he kept watching the online videos, tweaking his training and technique. He won the All-Africa Games title in 2011 with a national record. More YouTube.

In the buildup to the 2012 Olympics, Yego

got the chance to go to Finland and work with coach Petteri Piironen. After returning home, he kept in contact with Piironen through Skype. He still consulted his quasi-coach, too: YouTube.

Yego made the Olympic final by going past 80 meters. A Commonwealth Games title came in 2014 with 83.87. And then last year in Beijing, the world championships gold.

People are taking notice now. Yego is a star in Kenya, where he's known as the "YouTube man." He's quite happy with the attention after spending so many years being ignored for the distance

runners. "Being a world champion is a great thing," said Yego, who now wears sponsored training gear emblazoned with "92.72." "Everyone looks at you." The unorthodox throwing style, sometimes flying headlong onto the ground as he releases the javelin to give it every last bit of power and momentum, also makes good viewing. "The falling is not a technique," he said. "Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't." Faced with those options a decade ago, Yego made it happen - with some help from the internet. — AP



GEORGIAN MOTHER AND SON OUT TO MAKE HISTORY IN RIO

TBILISI: The Rio Olympics will be the eighth Games for Georgian shooter Nino Salukvadze, but it will be the first time when she will be joined by a very special team mate - her own son.

It is believed to be the first such case in Olympic history when a mother and her son will compete side by side. "I am very happy and very proud that I will be competing alongside my son. We will do our best to perform well," Salukvadze, 47, told Reuters.

Salukvadze was 19 when she won a gold medal in the women's 25-metre sporting pistol competition and silver in the women's 10-metre air pistol competition at the 1988 Seoul Olympics when she repre-

sented the team of the now defunct Soviet Union. At the 2008 Beijing Olympics she won a bronze medal for Georgia in a 10-metre air pistol event. Salukvadze's 18-year-old son Tsothe Machavariani shot a personal best in the 10-metre air pistol at the European Championship in February to get an Olympic qualifying spot. "It's a double joy for me, because I will participate in the Olympics for the first time in my life and because I will compete in Rio alongside my mother," Machavariani told Reuters. Salukvadze said she believed that family relations do not matter in sports and should not cool sport ardour. "But, frankly speaking, I am a mother after all and will be a fan of my son in Rio," she said. — Reuters



TBILISI: In this photo taken on Thursday April 28, 2016, former champion Nino Salukvadze, left, and her son Tsothe Machavariani pose for a photo during an interview with the Associated Press in Tbilisi, Georgia. — AP

AMERICAN HARRISON WANTS BOTH HURDLES RECORDS

One world record is not enough for Keni Harrison. Hours after breaking the 28-year-old 100 metres hurdles record on Friday to avenge failing to make the US Olympic team, the young American revealed there is another race she wants to conquer.

"(I want to) try to get another record in the 400 hurdles," Harrison told a conference call from London where she ran a record-breaking 12.20 seconds in the 100 metres hurdles. She bettered the record of Bulgaria's Yordanka Donkova from 1988 - four years before Harrison was born-by one hundredth of a second. It came in Harrison's first race since finishing sixth in the cut-throat U.S. Olympic trials where only the top three advance to the Games. "I wanted to come out here with a vengeance to show these girls what I have," said the 23-year-old, who defeated the three women who will represent the United States in Rio. Harrison was a sure-fired favourite before the American trials to make the US team and win gold at Rio after running the second-fastest 100 metres hurdles ever in May. "The pressure got to me," she said of the US trials. "I was really heartbroken. I wanted to give up so bad." But calling it a season was not the answer, she realised. "I knew this was the only way I was going to make myself feel better, to get back to training and go after that world record," she said. Harrison said she was nervous before Friday's preliminary race. "I just

tried to push all of the doubt out of my mind... I just told myself you know that you are the best. I just kept saying that over and over again," Harrison said. A speedy 12.40 seconds in the preliminary restored her confidence. "I'm back," Harrison said to herself. In the final, "I just told myself, keep going, keep going."

She did, becoming the fastest ever in the event. Harrison will next make an unexpected trip home to North Carolina and her family of 11 to watch and cheer on her US team mates in Rio before three more races in Europe. She hopes to wrap up the Diamond League 100 metres hurdles title, ensuring she will have a bye into the 2017 world championships in the event. "If I do that I have a chance to take a break from the 100 hurdles until world championships and try to get another record in the 400 hurdles," said Harrison.

"My main focus (next year) will be the 400 hurdles until the worlds and I will try to do both." She ran both events in college but her best of 54.09 seconds in the longer race is more than a second off the world record. Though heartbroken at missing Rio, the failure has brought a new challenge, she said.

"It is unfortunate I didn't get top three," said Harrison, who is "ok" with the US system. "But once I try again in a few years, I know getting top three is probably going to be the best feeling in the world, knowing that I conquered so much to get there." — Reuters



Keni Harrison