

UW athlete hammers at achievement

DAVE BOLING; The News Tribune (Tacoma, Wash.)

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One might not expect such impressive linear advancement from a man who spends so much of his day spinning in tight circles.

But Martin Bingisser is accomplished in so many areas that his efforts as one of the nation's top collegiate hammer throwers for the University of Washington seem almost secondary, as in the order of the frequently misapplied term: student-athlete.

When not at the vortex of a whirlwind in the hammer ring, Bingisser is wrapping up his first year of studies at the UW School of Law.

With the combination of a running start in high school, a redshirt season and an outrageous amount of scholastic dedication, Bingisser graduated (cum laude) with a BA in philosophy last spring, while he still had two years of eligibility remaining.



LUI KIT WONG/THE NEWS TRIBUNE

University of Washington hammer thrower Martin Bingisser often competes for small crowds removed in time and distance from track meets.

He heads to Eugene, Ore., this weekend as the Huskies compete in the Pacific-10 Conference outdoor track and field championships. Bingisser makes national hammer lists as easily as he makes the Dean's lists, currently ranking 14th in the nation with a best throw of 212 feet, 9 inches.

He also founded and operates a Web site dedicated to the "hammer heads" – www.hammercenter.com – which provides news, information, results and rankings.

"Martin is, without question, the most dedicated student-athlete I've ever coached," said Bud Rasmussen, the former UW throws coach who now works with the nation's elite throwers at the Olympic Training Center in California. "He's the greatest role model that I can possibly think of for young kids interested in achieving their maximum potential."

Bingisser's work ethic, Rasmussen said, is "legendary" in the eyes of his Huskies teammates.

Bingisser said it's more a matter of "just having good time-management skills." On a typical day, he gets up at 5:30 a.m., fights the traffic to West Seattle (because UW no longer has a hammer facility on campus), practices until 8:30, and then starts his class day. After classes, he tries to get in a weight-training session and then hits the library for the rest of the evening.

"He's so singularly focused on things he wants to do, it's amazing," said Harold "Hal" Connolly, the 1956 Olympic hammer champion, former world-record holder, and godfather of the American hammer movement.

When Connolly met Bingisser, he was a student at Bellevue's Interlake High. He was overweight and undermotivated.

"His parents have told me that his passion about hammer throwing has given him the sense of accomplishment that carried over to everything else," Connolly said. "He was in trouble academically when I met him."

Bingisser already had started his Web site at the time, and Connolly, in Washington to conduct a clinic, stayed with the Bingisser family. "When I was leaving, he asked me, 'What do you think is the one thing I could do that would help me?'" Connolly said. "I said, 'If you're asking me, I'd say you need to lose 50 pounds.'"

That conversation took place in midwinter. When Connolly next saw Bingisser that summer, he had dropped from about 290 pounds to 235.

"I was a decent shot putter, but I was not going to be a Division I athlete," Bingisser said. "But with the hammer ... you don't have to be 6-6, 300 pounds to succeed if you work hard."

Besides, it was radically different. It looked like wild fun.

"It's a little outside the mainstream and that's why some people overlook it," he said. "The first time I saw it, it was cool to watch. You have the elements of power and rhythm that make it really exciting. You've got four turns and some guys are launching it 250 feet. It's not just pure strength or pure speed ... there's all these different elements that make a great throw.

"And once you get into it, you get addicted to it."

Because the hammer is not a sanctioned event for Washington high schools, practitioners meet in unofficial competitions, which causes them to develop what Bingisser calls "a sense of community."

Also, because of the unpredictable and dangerous ballistics of the event, it's often held either some distance from stadiums or before anything else is contested.

"None of my competitions this year have been inside the track," Bingisser said. "We're always off to the side or even off campus. At some meets, we throw the night before, so there's definitely a disconnect to the rest of the team, but I think that also helps develop a community among throwers. If we were in the mainstream, it would promote the event more, but in another sense, I don't think the community would be that strong."

As would be expected of such an organized individual, Bingisser keeps a journal of his workouts. In recent seasons, he's compiled a dizzying log of nearly 9,000 throws.

Now, he conceded, under the ponderous demands of law school, he has trimmed back that regimen.

"My son is in law school," said Connolly, "and he told me there's no way you can go through that first year and continue to compete because the demands are so huge.

"But (Bingisser) has done it; he's a great young man."