

# Hammering the Obstacles

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There are two parts to being a student athlete in college: the academic side and the athletic side. Usually, a person excels at just one part of that continuum.

Hammer-thrower Martin Bingisser has managed to be one of those rare athletes who have not only had great accomplishments with the track and field team, but in the classroom as well.

"Martin puts the 'stud' in study," fifth-year senior teammate Will Conwell says.

Bingisser has already graduated with a BA in philosophy, but being just a junior in terms of athletic eligibility, it has complicated his time on the track.

In order to use his remaining two years of eligibility, Bingisser has enrolled in the UW law school.



**BROOKE MCKEAN/THE DAILY**  
UW hammer thrower Martin Bingisser in front of William H. Gates Hall.

The track team is glad he did, seeing as he's the No. 12 returning hammer-thrower in the country and second-ranked in the Pac-10.

"Martin is a student of the hammer," says Conwell. "He videotapes himself, throws all by himself; he is a creature of habit."

The hammer throw, or "the ball and chain," is not one of the more common track events. While attending high school in Bellevue, Wash., Bingisser stumbled across the event when his PE teacher recommended it.

"I wanted to do a sport," says Bingisser. "I'm a big guy and not really built for soccer or baseball, which were the other spring sports."

He didn't start taking the sport seriously until his senior year of high school, when 1956 gold medalist Harold Connolly came to his town and gave a clinic.

"He really gave me a lot of inspiration," Bingisser says.

With hammer-throwing only being offered as an official high school event in Rhode Island, Bingisser started out throwing shot put and threw the hammer as a club sport on weekends and during the summer. He also had to learn how to train and compete on his own. Only 15 to 20 high-school hammer throwers exist in the state.

"I always had to compete against the same guys [in high school] over and over," Bingisser says. "We got to know each other pretty well and created a close-knit group."

It was during these high school years that Bingisser founded the Hammer Center network, a Web site where throwers across the country can access rankings and track other peoples' progress.

Bingisser graduated high school already having college credits due to the Running Start Program. He left the Northwest for California, where he decided to red shirt his freshman year at Cal State Northridge.

During his first week there, his coach left and a new coach came in. After a year in California, Bingisser decided the Golden State wasn't for him, and transferred to Washington.

"I just didn't get along with the new coach as well," says Bingisser. "It wasn't what I traveled all the way to California for."

He joined the Huskies as the only hammer thrower in the program, despite not having a throwing facility on campus. Thus, Bingisser travels every morning to West Seattle to a special hammer-throwing facility. His days consist of throwing in the morning, then driving back to school to sit through a full day of classes and weight lifting in the afternoon. Time management became a key concept for Bingisser to master.

"It gets a little monotonous sometimes, getting up early and going all the way out there," he says. "But it is also something I want to do. I've been doing it for so long now too that I don't really mind it."

Bingisser's solo hammer-throwing career ended this year when freshman Zach Midles, the top-ranked prep hammer thrower in 2005, came to the UW.

"[Bingisser] was a big determining factor for why I came here," says Midles. "I saw his success and wanted to follow it. He's like a brother to me."

Matching Bingisser's success won't be easy. Last year he became the seventh Husky ever to throw more than 200 feet, with a best mark of 206 feet 11 inches moving him to fourth on the UW all-time hammer throw list. That throw also earned him a third-place finish at the Pac-10 Championships last year.

Bingisser's success in the classroom and with the hammer has also led him to Europe on a couple occasions. He has dual citizenship in Switzerland and competed for a club team there for a week and a half one summer. He also studied abroad in Sienna, Italy, a year ago, where he got to train and compete with some of the best hammer throwers from Hungary, Sylvania and Belarus.

"It's a different environment in Europe," Bingisser says. "Track and field is more popular over there and more people come to watch the competitions."

His bright future consists of law school and possibly coaching.

"I don't really know yet," he says. "There are a lot of other things you can do with a law degree besides being a lawyer. I just wanted to keep my options open while still taking credits and being eligible for the team."

However, Bingisser does not get too far ahead of himself. His goals for this year are clear.

"I'd like to go All-American this year," he says.

To do so, he must place in the top eight at NCAA. His teammates don't think this goal is too lofty.

"Oh man, he's going to do well this year," says Conwell. "I'm predicting a Pac-10 win and an All-American."

With a great start so far, Bingisser is leaving no goal, either athletic or academic, too far out of sight.