

In many sports, players are often praised for pure athleticism. The explosive power forward brings a packed house to its feet with a slam dunk. A defensive tackle bulldozes a 300-pound lineman on his way to a quarterback sack. And a pitcher has enough left in his right arm to throw 90-mph fastballs into the late innings. For track and field participants, that athleticism is the very essence of the game. Speed, power, and endurance are all the rage in Purdue track and field.

# athletes in Motion

by William Meiners

This May, with their sport in full bloom, a number of Purdue track and field athletes are striving for personal bests in speed, power, and endurance events that could put them among the Big Ten elite. The best of the Big Ten position themselves for a run at the NCAA Championships in June. And those flirting with individual national championships, just one year before the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London, could be invited to Olympic Trials for a chance to compete on the worldwide stage.

Head coach Jack Warner leads both the men's and women's track and field teams, a tall order with up to 60 student athletes per squad. To follow are pairs of speedsters, throwers, and runners who are pacing their respective teams up through the mid-May Big Ten Championships in Iowa.

## Speed: Two Big Ten champs

On the speed front, Warner has a pair of Big Ten indoor champions who hope to match those honors in the outdoor season. Shane Crawford, a senior, set the Purdue school record (6.66 seconds) in the 60-meter dash en route to his Big Ten first-place in 2010. This winter, he finished a self-described "heartbreaking" second in the event when he was out-leaned by Indiana's Kind Butler at the tape.

Speed, along with the form that best leads to flight, is a pivotal part of any long jumper's game. Junior Leah Eber, rich in each attribute, needed both in her final attempt to win her first Big Ten crown. This past February, she came up large, leaping to her best jump of the day and a new school and Lambert Fieldhouse record.

"Shane and Leah have both become students of the game," Warner says. "In a sport where kids typically don't

realize the importance of it, they're both constantly watching film and looking to improve on their performances. It helps that each of them also has some pretty good ability."

A certain calmness and tunnel vision allowed Eber to launch herself the requisite 20-plus feet (6.27 meters to be exact) for her biggest victory to date. She also placed sixth in the triple jump indoors, improving on her personal best by more than two feet.

Eber describes the tranquility as she steadied herself for her last long jump in Purdue's Lambert Fieldhouse. "If you take your mind out of the situation you can do anything," she says. "I have never had a time in my life where I felt more confident."

The confidence could be well timed for the Boilermaker from Indianapolis who medaled in the long jump at both the indoor and outdoor conference championships last year, finishing third inside and second outside. And she's hoping that mental toughness combined with the adrenaline rush of big-meet competition will propel her farther into the sandpit.

"My goals are extremely high. I'm always pushing myself to be better in everything I do," says Eber, an apparel and design technology major who enjoys making her own clothes. "Track is such a mental game, but once you get past that, it's really enjoyable."

Eber raises the bar on goals with each one achieved. So much so, she's even allowed herself to think about the possibilities of the Olympics in 2012. With a senior year left to compete and improve, she is confident in the training that could lead her to London.

Crawford, the two-time Big Ten indoor medalist with the proven raw speed to run with anyone, is hoping his body



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will hold up throughout the outdoor campaign. "I haven't run a healthy 100 meters in four years," he says. "Really, my racing strength has always been the final 20 meters of the 100."

To finish strong this spring, Crawford is learning what's best for his body. Both sprinter and coach know the smallest of things can add a fraction of a second and mean the difference between a first and second place. One thing's for certain with his most painful lesson learned indoors; Crawford says he won't be out-leaned at the tape again.

Though it's all about split seconds (and less) and Crawford can almost guarantee a victory if knows he's going to run a certain time, he doesn't like losing. That spirit goes back to his sixth grade, middle school beginnings in the sport where he routinely finished second to an eighth grader. The Winamac, Indiana, native wrestled a little bit and played some football, but didn't want to hurt his real opportunities in track. He was a 100-meter state champion and competed at the 2007 Pan American Junior Games in Brazil. But sometimes the very explosive power inherent to a sprinter can blow out a hamstring or strain a groin. For now, heading into spring, Crawford feels sharp fast.

However he finishes on the track this year Crawford hopes to stay with the sport. "I'd like to coach someday," the health and fitness major says. "I've run for 11 years. It's hard to get away from that."

## Power: strong-armed leaders

Fans of pure power would be hard-pressed to ignore the grunting, spinning efforts of a pair of senior throwers. Bill Hardcastle and Stacey Wannemacher have not only been leaders of their respective throwing groups, they've also been multi-year team captains.

"It's not hard to be a leader on this team because everyone respects you," says Wannemacher, now a three-time team captain.

While she's stepped it up as a vocal leader in her final season, Wannemacher has long walked the walk and put the shot. Last year, she earned All-American honors in that event, taking seventh at the NCAA Indoor Championships. She also made it to indoor nationals in the weight throw. This year, coming off knee surgery and a bicep injury, she placed seventh in the weight throw and third in the shot at the Big Ten Indoor Championships. She also received the Big Ten Sportsmanship Award.

Wannemacher's winning attitude may have rubbed off on teammate Dani Bunch, who was named the Big Ten Women's Indoor Track and Field Freshman of the Year. Bunch won the weight throw and placed fourth in the shot put at the conference championships.

As Wannemacher looks to regain her form with the discus and shot put in the outdoor season, she knows it won't be her final one. After graduation she plans to join



Left to right: Jacob Palmer, Leah Eber, Shane Crawford, Coach Warner, Bill Hardcastle, Camille Buscomb, and Stacey Wannemacher

the U.S. Navy and compete through one of their sponsored programs. In addition to serving her country — something she's wanted to do since 9/11 — she welcomes the continued training.

"In the throws it takes a long time to get technique down," says Wannemacher, whose high school in Ottoville, Ohio, didn't even have a weight room. "The older you are, the more experience you have, the more weight training you have. It's not going to necessarily happen right away, but I'm hoping to get to the Olympics in the future."

On the men's side, Hardcastle knows longer throws will make him competitive at the national level. "I've won three Big Ten titles, but I've never been an All-American," says the big man from South Dakota.

The top Boilermaker in the shot put, discus, and hammer throw, Hardcastle says his favorite event is whichever one is his current best. "The most fun is throwing stuff farther than anyone else," he says. "If I throw the shot put far, I like the shot. If I throw the disc far, that's my favorite."

While he's not ruling out the Olympic Trials if he peaks at the right time, Hardcastle, an organizational and leadership major, is looking at graduate schools and eventually working in the business end of sports. A two-time team captain, Hardcastle says the throwers (both men and women) often feed off each other in practice and competition. Once his events are done, though, he likes to make his way around to see how his fellow field athletes and runners are faring.

For the coach losing two athletes who have collectively captained five track and field teams, Warner sees their departure as a bittersweet goodbye. "Stacey and Bill have been the pillars of our throws program the last few years," he says. "When you've been around people like that for four or five years, you really miss them when they leave."

#### Endurance: gut checks to personal bests

In the middle-distance events, two runners, Camille Buscomb, a sophomore, and Jacob Palmer, a senior, are hoping

the mental and physical aspects of training will converge and lead them to new personal bests. For Palmer, an 800-meter man who scored points for the Boilers with a sixth-place finish at the Big Ten Indoor Championships, the decision to turn his full attention to track has put him closer to the podium in big meets.

"Track is definitely a tough sport when you're not succeeding," says Palmer, a former high school tennis player from Plymouth, Indiana, who used to play basketball in the offseason and simply gutted out his efforts on the track. "When I gave up some of those other things to focus on training, I started to see the hard work paying off."

It's all to the delighted surprise of his head coach. "Jacob has made himself into a Big Ten athlete," Warner says. "He just has a certain fighting spirit. He never quits, and he does all the right things."

One of those things is turning two laps around the outdoor track into an all-out sprint. "He's going against guys who run 46 and 47 in the quarter [the first lap] and his best is really 48," Warner says. "That just shows you how much toughness he has."

As he looks to get his 800 meters down to about a 1:48.5, which should be good enough to qualify for the NCAAs, Palmer knows that timing is everything. "I'm a lot stronger outdoors," says the two-time team captain who is also pondering graduate school and coaching. "I think my training really peaks in the outdoor season."

Buscomb, so aware of the mental challenges of track, chose psychology for her major — and a possible career. A New Zealand native, she landed in West Lafayette after two Purdue coaches went overseas to watch her race. In fact, she had never set foot in America until she came to Purdue.

In addition to battling some bouts with homesickness, the 1,500- and 5,000-meter runner endured some injuries early in her career. She redshirted last year, and says she's now learning how to race again. Continuous personal bests throughout the indoor season seem to have her on the upswing.

"Camille is just a very talented young lady," Warner says. "She's learning that success is a continuous, steady climb."

To Buscomb, it is all part of negotiating comfort zones. "Going home is easy, relaxing," she says of her trips back to New Zealand, which she manages about every year and a half. "But I'm on my path here."

That path includes success in her preferred 1,500-meter race. "A glamour event," Buscomb says. "It's technical and really fast. But I feel I'm best suited for it with a combination of speed and endurance."

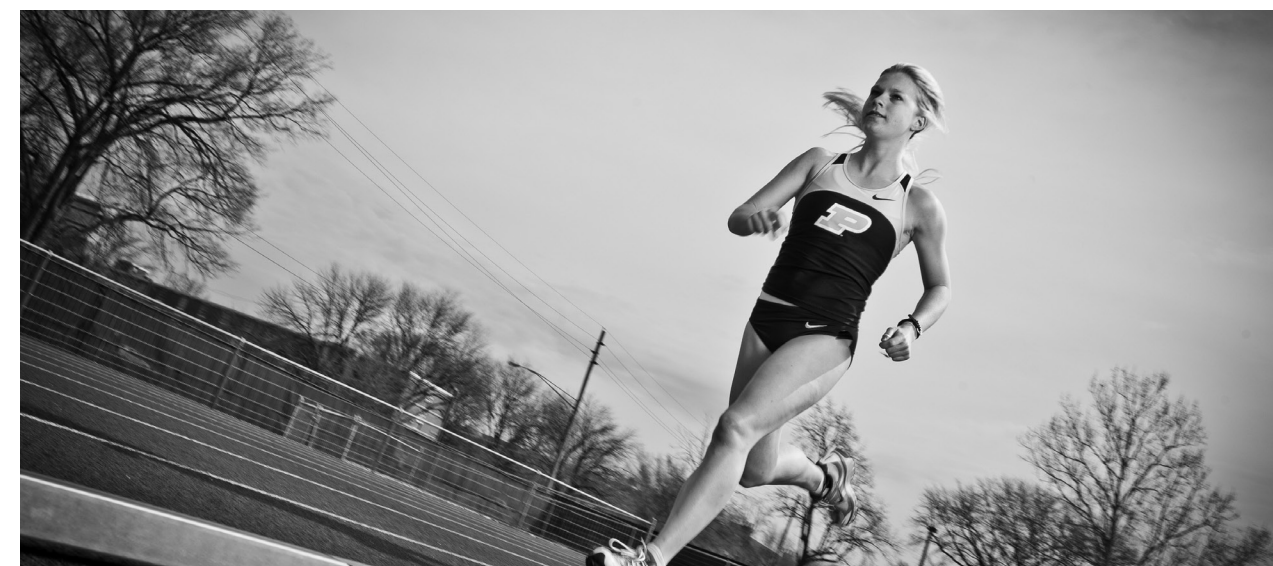
She also knows that it's the ideal combination — after a series of ups and downs — that could lead to the perfect race on the track. "When you manage to bring it all together

on a certain day, the combination of pain, adrenaline, and excitement, you just feel so good," Buscomb says.

For Buscomb and all her teammates, be they blessed with endurance, power, or speed, their personal bests arise when hard work meets good timing. And that's something worth struggling for, whether it happens at the Big Ten Outdoor Championships or at another of life's races down the road.

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