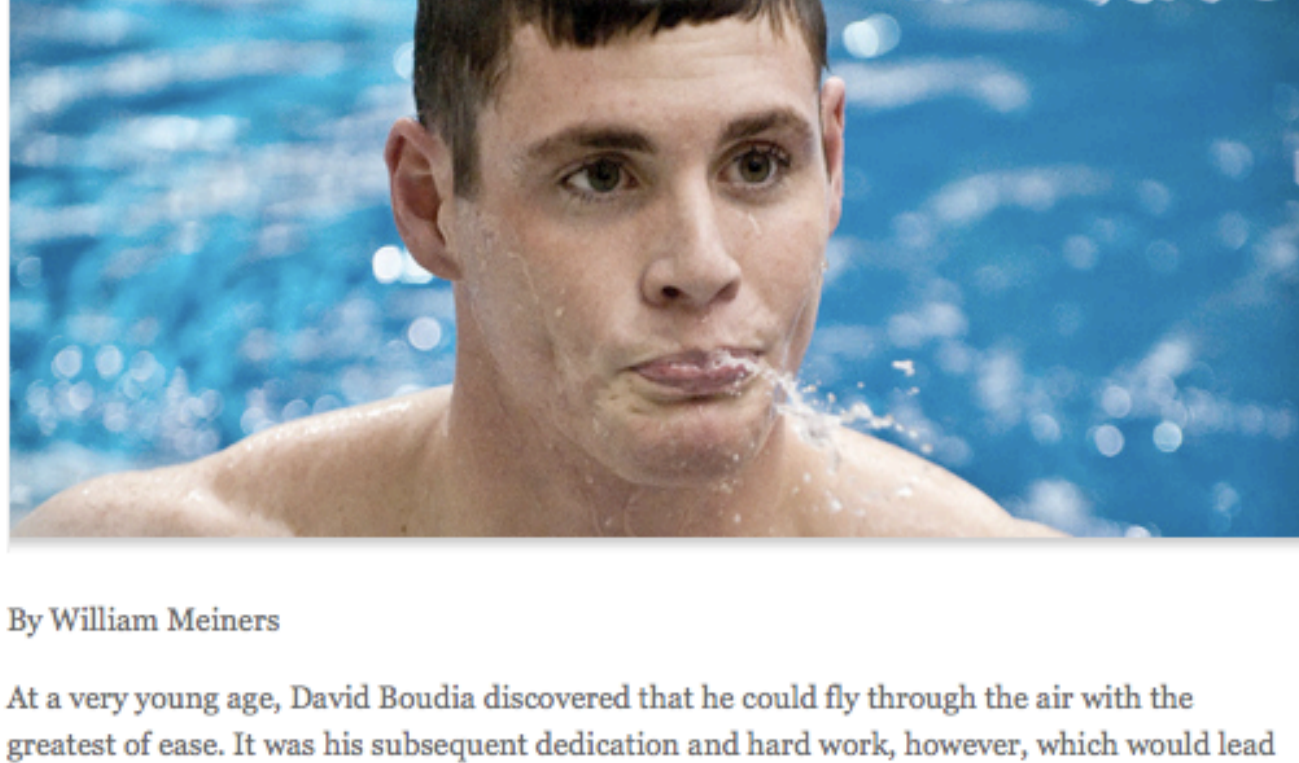


Diving In

Purdue's national diving champion, David Boudia, makes high-pressure acts look routine



By William Meiners

At a very young age, David Boudia discovered that he could fly through the air with the greatest of ease. It was his subsequent dedication and hard work, however, which would lead him to international diving events, the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, and 2009 Big Ten and national championships — all before leaving his teenage years.

Boudia, who claimed two national championship trophies last April in 3-meter and platform diving (and second place in the 1-meter diving competition), is only the 17th Purdue athlete to garner such individual honors in any sport. And as a 19-year-old freshman, Boudia could be collecting even more hardware as he continues his college career while also preparing for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

Much more than a freshman phenom, Boudia possessed such global exposure that some were surprised he opted to attend Purdue in the first place. To think of him as a blue-chip recruit might be akin to wondering how Kobe and LeBron (two famous first names in the National Basketball Association) would have fared in college hoops. By 18 years of age, Boudia was already a world-class athlete near the top of his game. He was named 2008 USA Diving Athlete of the Year. From 2006 through 2008, Boudia and Thomas Finchum, his partner in the synchronized 10-meter platform, medaled in 14 international events, including 10 consecutive events. Prior to that, in 2004, before either athlete could legally drive, they dove to a third place finish at the Olympic Trials in St. Louis. Last summer, the duo finished fifth in the event in Beijing, less than five points away from a bronze medal. But to understand Boudia's journey to Purdue, one needs to look back at what brought him to the pool in the first place.

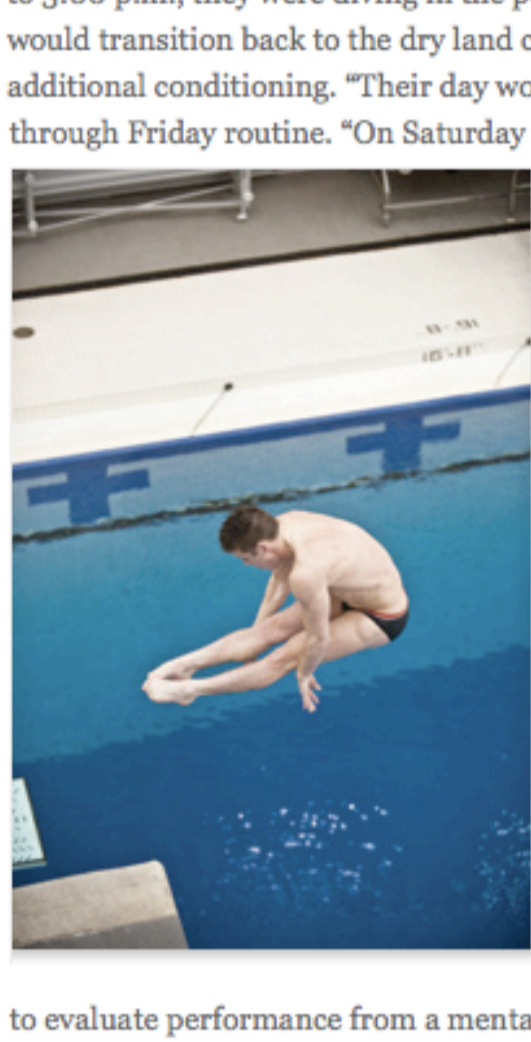
Flipping and twisting

Born in Texas, but raised in Noblesville, Indiana, Boudia says by the age of 10 he was looking to replace gymnastics with a sport that fulfilled his need for "flipping and twisting." A young friend who had won free diving lessons at an auction handed the lessons off to Boudia.

The free lessons were the beginning of the nearly 10-year relationship with his coach, John Wingfield, who immediately recognized the strength and quickness that could make Boudia a highly competitive diver. "He had some form issues to deal with, like pointing his toes" Wingfield said, "but David has always learned very fast."

Wingfield, the 2008 head coach of the U.S. Olympic diving team, has been the director and associate head coach of USA Diving's National Training Center since the center moved to Indianapolis in 2005. Both Finchum and Boudia, as well as their families, had to make the significant commitment to Wingfield and the full-time training needed to make an international splash. "It was year-round," Boudia says of the training. "We got a couple of weeks off in August. But it was five to seven hours a day and homeschooling at night."

Wingfield details the typical training day. Beginning at 7:30 a.m. until 10:00 a.m., the boys did conditioning, skill training on trampolines, and training on boards and platforms in a "dry land" training center. From 10:00 until 11:30 a.m., they could rest, eat, and study. From 11:30 to 3:00 p.m., they were diving in the pool from both springboards and platforms. Then they would transition back to the dry land center for either ballet or Pilates, as well as some additional conditioning. "Their day would end about 4:30 p.m.," Wingfield says of the Monday through Friday routine. "On Saturday we trained from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m."



While working on core strength, quickness, and form — all the details needed to compete at the highest level — Boudia was also learning how to be graceful under pressure. "David has worked very hard on his mental game," Wingfield says.

Working with sports psychologist David Carr, coordinator for Sport and Performance Psychology at the Indianapolis-based St. Vincent Sports Performance Center, Boudia has learned to take things one dive at a time, while downplaying the pressure situations by focusing on the routine. For Carr, that's all about addressing the "three C's: confidence, composure, and concentration."

"With divers, we help them learn to deal with distraction control," Carr says. "We help them deal with pre-competition mental routines. How are they going to prepare for each dive? How are they going to recover from good or bad dives? How are they going

to evaluate performance from a mental standpoint?"

The combination of athletic ability, mental toughness, and the tireless dedication to a well-established routine quickly led Boudia to the international stage. "After Thomas and I did well at the 2004 Olympic Trials, I knew it was possible to get to where I am now," he says. And long before Purdue may have even been on his radar, Boudia had China on his mind.

Building to Beijing

About one year before the 2008 Olympics, Wingfield says Boudia backed off on the springboard practice. "David was very competitive at a national level," he says, "but we had to really focus on the platform events, which we thought were our best events going into the Games."

It would be difficult not to separate the Olympics from the rest of his international meets, if only for its worldwide appeal. Boudia enjoyed being part of the U.S. contingent in the opening ceremonies and meeting everyone from the track and field athletes, to the basketball players, to even President George W. Bush. "It was very exciting to walk out and just have millions and millions of people watching you," Boudia says.

But back at the aquatics center called the "Water Cube," Boudia was all business. "Most elite-level athletes are the ones who trust their routines and have a confidence and simplicity in their mental preparation," says Carr, who attended the Games in official capacity as the USA Olympic Diving Team Sports Psychologist. "In essence, it's just another competition."

Boudia concurs. "It's just the same as World Championships and World Cups," he says. "The media hypes up the Olympics, but the same competitors are there, so you just handle yourself like you would in any other meet."

In the synchronized competition, Boudia and Finchum were in third place through four rounds in the event finals. A slight miscue in the fifth round took them down to fifth place, where they would finish. Even in spite of a sixth round score of 93.48, the second highest mark of the competition, the pair could not quite climb back into medal contention.

While the world anticipated and then watched the Games in Beijing, Boudia was wrestling with some decisions about his future. "I knew that if I went to college I ran the risk of not doing as well athletically," he says. After all, a full load of classes, homework, and the general adaptation to college life could drastically cut into 8-hour training days. But by the time he finished 10th in the individual 10-meter platform in China, Boudia had already committed to attending Purdue.



Onto Purdue

While anyone who has ever tried to woo a high-level athlete to a particular school seems interested in knowing what his secret was, diving coach Adam Soldati says they didn't really do anything different when recruiting Boudia to Purdue. Soldati knew Wingfield and Boudia's parents and simply wanted to show him Purdue's world-class facilities and program. Soldati's wife, Kimiko Hirai Soldati, was a 2004 Olympic diver, so the coach was familiar with the journey that Boudia would have taken to Beijing. For eight years, he worked with his wife on her road to Athens.

"I think David really wanted to go to college," Soldati says. "He wanted to experience college, but he was really scared that his diving wasn't going to get any better. So we just sat him down and I told him he would get better through our training."

Sold on Soldati, the diving program, and the possibilities of Purdue, Boudia missed the first day of classes because of the Olympics, but soon took eagerly to his new life on campus. "I knew that this team and the way Adam handles himself on the pool deck was exactly what I was looking for," he says.

Boudia even came to campus with Wingfield's blessing. "As I told David as we were going through that process," his Olympic coach says, "I knew he would get the attention he would need from the coaching staff and the university. As he moved to the college scene and started to dive more springboard with Adam there, he really cleaned up some things, was very aggressive, and did quite well."

To keep their synchronized timing down, Boudia reconnects with Finchum (who remains in full-time training in Indianapolis) at least once a month and during breaks. "I think he will continue to progress on the 3-meter under Adam's tutelage," Wingfield says. "In the next year and a half he'll be able to do two to three events that he really wants to go after in London. But we'll cross that bridge in the next year to a year and a half."

While Soldati warned Boudia that his freshman year could be one of the toughest years of his life, he says simply that the young athlete is as resourceful in the classroom as he is talented on the boards. "Whether it's whether it's academics, or something social, David just finds a way to get it done," he says.

"I'm handling it well," the communications major says of his schoolwork. "The first semester was hard because I didn't really know what to expect. Home schooling actually helped because it's studying on your own and kind of what you do in college."

And as far as his graceful entries into the pool, Boudia admits that he truly has improved as an athlete, most noticeably through his "consistency." Note the number of weeks he was named Big Ten Diver of the Week (see sidebar).

"On springboard he had a long way to go," Soldati says. "We spent a lot of time trying to get him at a level that we could be in a position to win championships. We put ourselves in that position and he executed."



London and beyond

Boudia will like to compete in two more Olympics, but knows he'll simply stay focused on the London 2012 Games for now. The pressure knows no boundaries — be it at home or abroad. Soldati believes the biggest pressure on the college front may come from the fact that he's expected to win everything. "David felt the pressure of Purdue behind him, but he used the same tools and skills that he used along the way and handled it," says Soldati, who was named Diving Coach of the Year after the NCAA championships.

Both coaches share in the pride of Boudia's collegiate success. "I think it's awesome," Wingfield says. "It's a tribute to what he has put into his training over the last 10 years. It's a feather in the

cap of our program to help produce someone at that level who can walk into the NCAAs as a freshman and win two events. And kudos to not only our program but to Adam and the swim program there for caring for him properly and continuing to bring him along."

Even Carr, the sports psychologist, seems to be part of Purdue's successful transition to college life. Coordinating psychology services with the Purdue Athletics Department, Carr believes that Boudia's strong family support is also helping him balance out the new pressures of life on campus.

Competing as part of the U.S. Diving Team in Mexico in late April, Boudia and Finchum faced another kind of pressure — the fear of the unknown. With all the speculation about the swine flu, the 10,000-seat arena remained closed to spectators, so the divers took to the water in a virtually empty arena. Still, true to form and their training, the pair took home a bronze medal. After the flu drama in Mexico, the duo did one better at an international meet in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, earning silver medals in the men's synchronized 10-meter. After the flu drama in Mexico, the duo did one better at an international meet in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, earning silver medals in the men's synchronized 10-meter. And while London looms three years away, you can bet Boudia is eyeing it all with his trademark confidence, composure, and concentration.

-William Meiners is a writer for the Department of Marketing and Media. Photography by Chris Bucher.

Rookie Sensation

David Boudia's first-year accomplishments at Purdue include:

- NCAA Diver of the Year
- NCAA 3-meter and platform champion
- 1-meter All-American
- NCAA meet record in 3-meter (493.100) and platform (530.45)
- Texas A&M Student Recreation Center Natatorium record in 3-meter (493.10) and platform (530.45)
- Seven-time Big Ten Diver of the Week (breaks previous Big Ten record of five in one season)
- Big Ten Diver of the Year
- Big Ten Swimming/Diving Freshman of the Year
- Big Ten Diver of the Championships
- First Team All-Big Ten
- Big Ten 1-meter, 3-meter, and platform diving champion
- Doris Z. Holloway Pool record in 1-meter (446.65), 3-meter (495.30), and platform (553.60)
- Big Ten record in 1-meter (446.65), 3-meter (495.30), and platform (553.60)
- Purdue record in 1-meter (446.65), 3-meter (495.30), and platform (553.60)
- Selected to compete for Team USA in this summer's World Championships

