

# GOING for GOLD

## The Rise of IU Olympians

by Ava Slowey

The sun beat down on the competitors on an unseasonably sweltering September afternoon. The curious onlookers at Francis Field, in St. Louis' Washington University, were attendees at the 1904 World's Fair — and by extension, at the third modern Olympic Games. Although the various Olympic competitions were spread out over four-and-a-half months and became lost in the chaos of the Fair, this was the fourth and last day of concentrated competition for track and field.

Leroy Samse, a sophomore at Indiana University, picked up his sturdy (as in unbending) vaulting pole and stared at the bar, 11-foot-3 off the ground, at the end of the short runway. Samse had knocked off the bar from this same height just moments earlier, putting him out of contention for first place.





The gold medal was now beyond his reach — American Charles Dvorak, the world record holder, had cleared 11 feet, 6 inches meters in the first round of jumping, setting an Olympic record in the process. Samse has successfully jumped 11 feet, but had failed in his second jump.

Fortunately for him, so had three other vaulters, necessitating a jump-off to decide second and third place. Two other Americans missed at 11 feet, leaving only Samse and fellow Indianan Lou Wilkins to decide the remaining medals. Samse's second effort at 11-foot-three was more successful than his first, and he would emerge with the silver.

Just 200 miles from IU's Bloomington campus, LeRoy Samse was the first Indiana Hoosier to compete at the Olympic Games, and the first to win a medal. But he would be far from the last in either category; Just hours after Samse's last jump, hurdler Thad Shideler would win IU's second Olympic medal — a silver in the 110 meters.

In the century that would follow, IU students and staff would earn more than 200 Olympic berths and bring home 102 more medals, including 55 golds. If IU were a country, that would be good enough for 35th on the all-time medals table, and only 22 countries have bettered the university's gold-medal haul.

After 1904, there would be no Hoosier Olympians until the 1932 Games in Los Angeles. Ivan Fuqua ran the first leg of the 4x400 relay for Team USA to earn the first IU gold medal, setting a world record in the heats and then breaking it in the final.

World War II would cast a heavy shadow over the Olympics: the 1936 Games were held under Hitler's watch in Berlin, and the war prevented the event from being held again until 1948, in London. IU's Roy Cochran, denied a chance to compete in 1940 and '44 when he was serving as a Navy Lieutenant in the Pacific, returned to the track at the XIV Olympics to win golds in the 400-meter hurdles and the 1600-meter relay, becoming the university's first multi-medalist.

Thereafter, IU would be represented at every Summer Olympic Games, and, with the exception of 2004, Hoosiers would medal in every one.

Milt Campbell was already an Olympic medalist when he enrolled at IU, having won the silver medal in the decathlon at the 1952 Olympic



Above; IU pole vaulter LeRoy Samse poses with his medals and trophies in 1906. Right; Milt Campbell, center, clears the final hurdle of the 110-meter hurdles event in the Olympic decathlon at the 1952 Helsinki Games.

Games in Helsinki while still in high school. In Bloomington, Campbell would excel in track and field as well as football. He would earn a second trip to the Olympics in 1956, surpass his previous success by winning the decathlon and setting an Olympic record, edging fellow American Rafer Johnson.

Campbell's athletic career did not end with the 1956 closing ceremonies. He would set world records in hurdles the following year — the only Olympic decathlon champion to ever hold a world record in an individual event — and would play football with the Cleveland Browns. He was also a world-class swimmer, and might well have qualified for the 1972 Olympic judo team had he not been a professional football player.

Sadly, and despite his accomplishments as an extraordinary athlete, Milt Campbell never became a household name. Other Olympic decathletes — Bob Mathias, Rafer Johnson and Bruce Jenner — became national celebrities after their victories, but Campbell walked off the 1956 podium with no endorsements and little fanfare. When asked years later about these differences in treatment, Campbell said that,

IU's early Olympic success primarily featured track and field athletes, but beginning in the 1950s, swimming and diving emerged as the



university's dominant Olympic sport. Like Milt Campbell, Hawaiian Bill Woolsey arrived on IU's campus with an Olympic medal — gold in the

“America wasn't ready for a black man to be the best athlete in the world.”

1952 4x200 freestyle relay — and would win a silver medal in 1956, while a junior at IU, in the same race. Woolsey would be the first of many Hoosier medalists in aquatic events.

Every one of the 14 Summer Olympiads since Woolsey's debut has featured IU swimmers — 100 berths in all, with 43 athletes earning 66 medals, including 34 golds. Olympic swimming and diving teams have also regularly featured IU coaches, including Doc Counsilman, who was IU's head swimming coach for 33 years, and whose Olympic teams, in 1964 and 1976, won 21 of the 24 swimming events. IU Diving coach Hobie Billingsley was part of six Olympic Games, coaching American and Austrian teams as well as serving as a

diving judge in 1992 and 1996.

One of Billingsley's most successful —and surprising — athletes was Lesley Bush. The New Jersey native was just 16 when she finished 11th in the AAU championships in 1964, despite the fact that her high school did not have a diving team. She trained that summer under Billingsley, who told her she had an “outside, outside, outside chance” of making the Olympic team.

She narrowly missed earning a spot on the 3-meter springboard, finishing fourth at the Olympic trials. But Bush managed to finish third in the daunting 10-meter platform, making the Olympic team even though the trials were her first ever competition from that height.

She came in to the Olympics as an after-thought, but shockingly scored 9s with her first dive, opening up a large lead that she never relinquished. When a reporter called her parents to get their reaction to her gold medal, they thought someone was fooling them; they were not convinced until their daughter called them an hour later.

## Meet IU's 2020 Olympic Medalists

The Hoosiers sent 16 athletes and two coaches to the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Six returned with medals, including four golds, five silvers and a bronze, pushing IU's Olympic medal total to 114.



### Zach Apple

(graduated in 2019)

In his first Olympics, Apple won gold in the 4x100 freestyle relay and won his second gold in the 4x100 medley relay.



### Andrew Capabianco

(senior)

The seven-time All-American paired with fellow IU student Michael Hixon to take the silver medal in the men's 3-meter synchronized springboard.



### Michael Hixon

(graduated in 2018)

Hixon's silver medal in the 3-meter synchronized springboard was his second in the event, duplicating his second-place finish at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.



### Lilly King

(graduated in 2018)

The two-time gold medalist added to her Olympic medal success by winning two silvers and a bronze in Tokyo, setting a personal best in the 200-meter breaststroke.



### Jessica Parratto

(graduated in 2019)

The Tokyo Olympics was Parratto's second, and she bettered her 2016 results, when she finished seventh, by reaching the podium with a silver medal in the women's 10-meter syn-



### Blake Pieroni

(graduated in 2018)

Pieroni won a gold medal as a member of the 2016 4x100 freestyle relay team. In Tokyo, he won his second gold in the event, swimming the second leg on a team that included Zach Apple, and added another gold as an alternate on the 4x100 medley relay team.

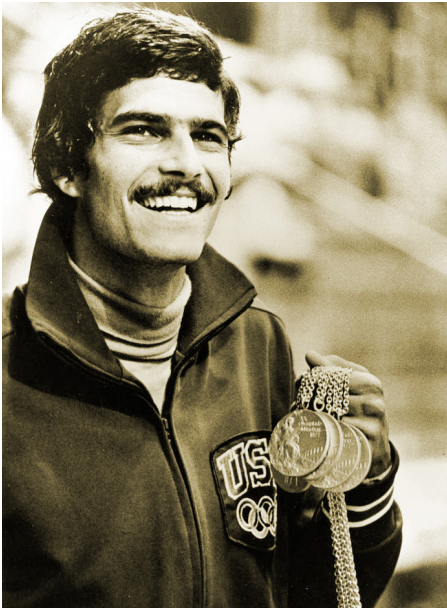
Bush enrolled in IU after graduating high school, and would win five AAU national titles while a student, but was unable to duplicate her Olympic success in 1968, finishing 20th. By that time, she had married IU swimmer Charlie Hick-

cox, who at that same Olympics would become IU's first three-time gold medal winner, winning the 200 and 400-meter individual medleys as well as the 4x100 medley relay. For good measure, Hickcox would add a silver in the 100-meter



backstroke. A year later, Counsilman, his coach, would call Hickox “the best all-around swimmer of all-time.”

Hickcox as not the only IU swimmer to find success at the 1968 Games; Don McKenzie won two gold medals, beating Hickcox in the 100-meter backstroke and teaming with him in the 400-meter IM. And teenager Mark Spitz, though



IU's Mark Spitz smiles shortly after his record-breaking seventh gold medal at the 1972 Olympic Games.

still a few months from enrolling at IU, won two team golds as well as a silver and bronze in individual events.

But the 1968 Olympic Games were widely seen as a failure for Spitz, who at age 18 held numerous world records and who had brashly predicted he would win six gold medals in Mexico City. The following January, Spitz decided to attend IU, largely so he could train with Counsilman. While at Indiana, Spitz would win eight individual titles. He returned to the Olympics in Munich in 1972, to repeat his quest for six gold medals.

He would do even better — Spitz won seven gold medals in Munich, setting a new world record in each event. His seven golds at a single Olympics was a record, and would not be surpassed until Michael Phelps won eight in 2008. A national hero, Spitz retired from swimming, and launched an acting career. He would later work as a broadcaster and Olympic commentator. Spitz attempted an unlikely comeback in 1992, when as a 41-year-old he attempted to qualify for the Barcelona Olympic Games. He managed to make the final of the 100-meter butterfly, but finished last.

From an athletic standpoint, Indiana University is generally considered a basketball school. The Hoosier's men's team has won

five national championships, ranks sixth in NCAA Tournament appearances, seventh in tournament victories and eighth in Final Four appearances. That success has translated to the Olympic Games as well.

In 1976, Quinn Buckner was captain of both the undefeated national champion Hoosiers and the gold-medal-winning U.S. team; senior Scott May was Buckner's teammate on both squads. And in 1984, IU's Bob Knight led the U.S. Olympic team to another gold medal, coaching a team that featured then-college superstars Michael Jordan and Patrick Ewing as well as IU sophomore point guard Steve Alford. In between, the 1980 U.S. Olympic team was to have featured IU's Isiah Thomas, though the U.S. Olympic boycott of the Moscow Games would prevent him from competing.

Ten other IU athletes would make Olympic teams but be kept from the Games by the 1980 boycott. But IU would not be shut out altogether: five athletes competed for other national teams, with Mark Kerry winning a gold medal as a member of Australia's 4x100 medley relay team.

IU athletes would continue to feature on Olympic teams over the next few years, as the Olympic program continued to expand and include more sporting events. IU second baseman Mickey Morandini delayed entering the Major



Team USA swimmers (from left) Caeleb Dressel, Blake Pieroni, Bowen Becker and Zach Apple celebrate with their gold medals in the men's 4x100m freestyle relay. Pieroni and Apple are recent graduates from Indiana University.

League Baseball draft so that he could play for the 1988 U.S. Olympic team in Seoul, where he would win a gold medal. And in 2000, former IU catcher Michelle Venturilla was the first Hoosier to compete in Olympic softball — and the first to win gold.

The years 1988-2012 would be relatively lean years for IU at the Olympic Games, however. Hoosier athletes would win just four golds over those seven Olympiads, including diver Matt Lenzi (in the 1992 3-meter springboard) and sprinter David Neville in 2008, who won gold as a member of the men's 4x100 relay and whose bronze in the men's 400 was IU's first individual track and field medal since 1960.

IU swimmers would re-establish themselves as Olympic champions in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Seven IU swimmers and four divers would qualify for Olympic teams, and swimmers Cody Miller and Blake Pieroni would be the first Hoosier men's swimmers to win gold since Mark Kerry 36 yers earlier.

The IU star of the Rio games, though, was 19-year-old Lilly King, who won gold in the 100-meter breaststroke and, swimming the breaststroke leg, in the 400-meter medley relay.

TV cameras caught both sides of a finger-wagging rivalry that developed between King and Russia's Yulia Efimova, who had recently served a previous doping suspension. Though the two had each won their semifinal heats with nearly identical teams, King easily bested Efimova by more than a half second in the final — setting an Olympic record.

IU's 2016 Olympic success would not be confined to the pool. Canadian high jumper Derek Drouin improved on his bronze medal from the 2012 Olympics in London by winning gold in Rio, clearing 7 feet, 9 3/4 inches despite having been diagnosed with a stress fracture in his back just three months earlier. Drouin became the first Hoosier individual gold medalist in track and field since Milt Campbell and long jumper Greg Bell in 1956; Drouin and Campbell are the only athletes from IU to win track and field medals in two Olympics.

Leroy Samse would have had little thought, as he planted his pole at the end of the Francis Field runway in 1904, that he was about to become the first in a long line of Hoosier athletes to ascend an Olympic podium. The third modern Olympiad was a poorly attended sideshow to the World's fair, far from the global phenom-

enon the Games would become over the ensuing 117 years. But as the Olympics grew in popularity, so would the number of Hoosier Olympians — averaging 14 representatives since 1964 and peaking with 23 in 1968. Few schools can claim this level of quality or consistency in Olympic competition.

Hoosiers returned in force to the Olympic stage in Tokyo, where the pandemic-delayed Games of the XXXII Olympiad commenced in July. Sixteen athletes and two coaches represented IU at the Games, including Lilly King and Blake Pieroni. Swimming and diving again commanded a majority of the Olympic berths, but IU athletes also competed in golf, water polo and soccer. The U.S. Olympic contingent featured nine Hoosiers, but the school also had representatives on the teams from Brazil, Canada, Egypt and Spain. IU athletes also competed for Israel and New Zealand, bringing to 28 the number of nations for which a Hoosier has competed in the Olympic Games.

The 2020 Olympians continued the school's impressive Olympic success, winning ten medals, including four golds. They are continuing a tradition of sporting excellence that few schools — and indeed not that many countries — can match.

## IU's Olympic Haul

Hoosier athletes have won more than one hundred Olympic medals, the 10–most of any university.

