



Scott Roth vaulted to 3rd place at the 2006 Golden West Invitational Track & Field Meet.

Photo by Don Gosney

Scott Roth

Hoping to Vault to a Happy Birthday Place on Team USA

By Bob Burns

In hindsight, it's easy to imagine a precocious kid, vaulting in the backyard pit his father built for him at their Granite Bay home, envisioning himself competing for a spot on the 2012 U.S. Olympic team.

He'd win everything there was to win in high school. He'd go on to college and win some NCAA titles. He'd be 24 years old when the London Olympics rolled around.

To a remarkable extent, Scott Roth's career has followed that precise trajectory.

He was not only the best prep vaulter in the country while attending Granite Bay High School outside Sacramento; he was one of the top juniors in the world.

At the University of Washington, Roth won three NCAA championships and was a seven-time All-American. As a college senior in 2011, he won NCAA titles indoors and out and cleared a school record 18 feet, 9¼ inches.

As for the upcoming U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials in Eugene, Ore., Roth is confident, but experience has tempered his optimism with pragmatism.

"I wouldn't be surprised if I made the team, and I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't make it," Roth said. "There are no guarantees in the pole vault."

Roth turns 24 on June 25, the same day pole-vault qualifying will be held in Eugene. The final will be held three days later on June 28.

Another Washington graduate, former world outdoor champion Brad Walker, is considered the Trials favorite, and another Sacramento-area native, two-time Olympian Derek Miles, was recently picked by *Track & Field News* to finish second. The magazine picked Roth to finish fourth.

But the pole vault is a notoriously unpredictable event. Roth is one of the younger contenders, but he's been around long enough to build a thick skin.

"I've seen the unpredictability of this event ruin people," Roth said. "How you handle the upsets can make or break you as a vaulter. I've gotten better at handling it. It really bothered me in high school. When I wasn't jumping as well as I wanted, I'd get so down on myself, so pessimistic.

"I'm at the point where I want to jump well at any meet, but I'm fully prepared for anything that can happen."

In most cases, the top three first three finishers at the U.S. Trials qualify for the Olympics. Roth, however, must clear the Olympic "A" standard of 18-9¼ either before or during the Trials alongside with a top-three finish. He has cleared that height twice before, but not during the qualifying time window. His most recent 18-9¼ clearance came at the Mt. SAC Relays on April 16, 2011 – two weeks before the time period for Olympic qualifying standards opened.

Earlier this month, he cleared 18-1¾ at a meet in Chula Vista and had two strong attempts at 18-9¼. Hamstring problems have troubled him this spring but he says he's hitting peak form at the right time.

"I feel like I can get a PR (personal record) just about any day now," Roth said. "I'm on the verge."

Under the tutelage of his father, Curt, a standout vaulter at Sacramento State, Scott When it came time to select a college, Scott cleared 16-5 as a high school sophomore, when he won the first of three consecutive California state championships. He also won a silver medal at the 2005 IAAF World Junior Championships and won the USA junior title, among other honors. In 2006, his best of 17-5 ranked him ninth among junior-age vaulters.

Rather than attend college close to home in California, Roth selected Washington, where under highly regarded coach Pat Licari, he continued his rise through the ranks.

"I couldn't have asked for a better college career," Roth said. "It was the right place for me."

Licari believes Roth will be a "major contender" in Eugene.

"His biggest strength is that he's an awesome competitor," Licari said. "

After graduating with a degree in biology, Roth chose to continue living in Seattle and working with Licari. He has as a part-time job working as a valet, but like many post-collegians, Roth is experiencing a difficult adjustment to the professional ranks. He's hopeful that he'll soon sign a sponsorship deal with Nike.

"There's not as much structure when you're no longer with a college program," Roth said. "I have to organize my trips and pay for some of them myself. I kind of took all that for granted in college. All I had to do was show up."

At the 2012 USA Indoor Championships in Albuquerque, Roth cleared 18-4½ to finish second behind Walker (19-2¾) and qualify for his first U.S. senior national team. At the World Indoor Championships in Istanbul, Turkey, Roth failed to clear a height in the final. French star Renaud Lavillenie won at 19-6¼.

"It was an eye-opening experience," Roth said. "I'd never been in a competition with such high-caliber athletes. I was so nervous that I wasn't able to perform. It's something I had to experience – I had to have my first world championships at some time. Hopefully, the next time I'll be prepared."

He won't be surprised if that chance comes Aug. 10 in London.