

## **Stephanie Brown Trafton: Discus Olympic Gold Medal Defending Champion**



**Stephanie inspires young athletes wherever she goes. Here she visits with Roseville Revolution Track Club members.**

By Bob Burns

For someone accustomed to being an underdog, Stephanie Brown Trafton is finding that she likes the pressure of being the defending Olympic champion.

"The pressure makes me better," she said. "I run better on adrenaline."

This figures to be an adrenaline-fueled summer for Brown Trafton, the Galt resident who shocked the track world at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China. She'll compete in the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials later this month in Eugene, Ore., where she's expected to finish among the top three and qualify for the London Olympics.

"I have always been strong in Olympic years," Brown Trafton said. "The Olympics motivates me like nothing else."

Four years ago, at the Beijing Olympics, Brown Trafton became the first U.S. woman since 1932 to win a gold medal in the discus. While she won't be the favorite in London – that mantle goes to Sandra Perkovic of Croatia or reigning world champion Li Yanfeng of China – Brown Trafton won't be able to surprise anyone this time around.

"I feel pretty good about it," Brown Trafton said. "I usually like being the underdog, but I've had to change my story since 2008."

Regarding this year's prospective Olympic field, Brown Trafton said, "It looks to me like it's a pretty crowded group at the top. Lots of people can throw during the year in meets that aren't as important as the Olympics. When the pressure is on, we'll be able to see who is mentally prepared for the challenge on the day of the big competitions."

After a sub-par season in 2010, a year devoid of any major meets, Brown Trafton placed a strong fifth at last year's World Championships in South Korea. She opened her 2012 season with a couple of solid performances in Australia before breaking the U.S. record on May 4 in Maui, Hawaii, throwing 222 feet, 3 inches.

Brown Trafton broke the previous record of 222-0, set in 2007 by Suzy Powell-Roos of Modesto.

"I can't say I was disappointed, setting an American record," Brown Trafton said. "But I wanted to break the record by 10 feet. If I can put together a throw from the front to the finish, I have the ability to throw farther. I actually felt as though my technique was better in February than it is now, but my strength level and overall fitness are better now."

With its strong trade winds, Maui has become something of a discus Mecca. There are no wind restrictions on discus performances, and many of the longest throws occur on open fields where the right breeze can add several feet to a thrower's distance.

"Many throwers have the ability to change their technique to be able to throw well in windy conditions," Brown Trafton said. "My technique is actually suited better for throwing where there is no wind. That's probably why my American record didn't feel like it was technically sound. The wind can help the discus in one throw and hurt it in the next."

One of the tallest female throwers in the world at 6-foot-4, Brown Trafton is athletic enough to have run 400 meters in 57.44 seconds. She played basketball and competed in track at San Luis Obispo, finishing second in the discus at the 2003 NCAA Championships in Sacramento.

In 2004, a year before she married Cal Poly classmate Jerry Trafton, Brown first showed her competitive mettle on the big stage. In the opening round of the U.S. Olympic Trials in Sacramento, she uncorked the first 200-footer of her life, reaching 203-1 that ultimately placed second and gave her a berth on the Olympic team.

Four years later, she finished third in the Trials to make her second Olympic team. In Beijing, she reached her winning distance of 212-4. Brown Trafton wound up winning by more than three feet over the silver medalist, Yarelys Barrios of Cuba.

If it wasn't the biggest Olympic upset victory by a U.S. athlete since Billy Mills won the 10,000 meters in 1964, it was close. The year ended with her being named the Jesse Owens Award as the top U.S. female track and field athlete.

At last year's World Championships in Daegu, South Korea, Brown Trafton achieved her best result since Beijing, placing fifth with a best throw of 209-5. Now a 32-year-old veteran in the prime of her career, Brown Trafton views the upcoming Olympics as chance to not only defend her title but to enjoy the sights and sounds – and tastes of London.

"It's going to be so much fun," Brown Trafton said. "My father, mother and husband are all going. The food is different (in London), but unlike Beijing, at least we'll know what we're eating."

At the upcoming Olympic Trials, she's already making plans to stop by the Sweet Life Bakery in Eugene.

"Most of my good experiences are centered around food," she said with a laugh.

When she's not throwing and training, Brown Trafton enjoys hunting with her husband. She does most of her training at Sacramento State, where she serves as a volunteer coach working with the university's donor programs and home-meet hospitality. She also serves as the athlete chair on the Pacific Association's board of directors.

At last month's PAUSATF Championships in San Mateo, where Brown Trafton threw a winning 208-2 over a strong field that included Roos-Powell, she enjoyed sharing the circle with several neophytes who had never topped 100 feet.

"It was great to see those girls get personal records," Brown Trafton said. "My sport is not glamorous. I hope I'm able to inspire kids to find out their passion is and then go out and pursue it."

"I have always been motivated to be the best so I can wear the USA uniform at the Olympic Games. This sport has a great unifying effect on every country and I know that everyone in the country will be so proud of all efforts of USA Olympians. I will be blessed just to be a part of the Olympic Games."

Discus qualifying in London's Olympic Stadium will be held Aug. 3 on the first day of track and field competition. The final will be held the following evening.

"I know I'm going to be nervous for the first throw," Brown Trafton said. "That's a good thing."