

Former UWO marksman has Olympic medal in sight

by Alex Hummel - Wednesday, July 18, 2012

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/19978/former-uwo-marksman-has-olympic-medal-in-sight/>

Perhaps, a little known fact: the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh has a rifle team. It's an intramural squad, a pretty good one, too, attached to the Army ROTC program.

And, perhaps, an even lesser-known fact: One of its former team members, a passionate sharpshooter who grew up in tiny Darlington in the southwest corner of Wisconsin, is set to compete for an Olympic medal in the 2012 games.

“He’s an odds-on favorite to medal,” said Mark Bernarde, coach and adviser of the UW Oshkosh Rifle Team. “I’m hoping for gold, but that’s just me.”

The “he” Bernarde is referring to is Michael McPhail. McPhail, 30, is drawing some worthy spotlight as he gets ready to compete for Team USA in the 50m rifle competition at the 2012 London Olympics.

McPhail, who is already in London and was not immediately available to speak to *UW Oshkosh Today*, was a UW Oshkosh student whose passion for the sport of shooting was hard not to notice, Bernarde said.

“His family has a lot of competitive and recreational shooters,” Bernarde said. “What rural kid doesn’t like to shoot? He grew up like most rural kids, shooting pop cans and then got onto paper.”

Bernarde said McPhail was a member of a junior shooting club in the Darlington area. He first got the UW Oshkosh team’s attention during one of the junior sectional competitions the University hosts every year. McPhail opted to attend UW Oshkosh and pursue a business degree. He quickly got involved with the rifle team.

“Mike shot OK,” Bernarde said. “He didn’t set the world on fire, but you could see his passion.”

McPhail was part of the UW Oshkosh rifle team for four years, earning All-Conference honors his last two years. He placed second All-Conference over his first two years, Bernarde said, crediting McPhail’s success to a remarkable dedication to the sport.

The team uses a rifle range in the lower-level of Kolf Sports Center on campus. UW Oshkosh’s intramural squad competes against the likes of Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State, Purdue and a few other NCAA Division One schools with rifle teams that reformed the Big Ten conference into the Western Intercollegiate Rifle Conference. Their season runs from the end of October through national competitions in March.

“We practice at 6 a.m. in the morning, and not many kids like to get up that early,” Bernarde said. “Mike would be standing outside the door waiting for me to open up the range. He was just that passionate about it... So, flash forward four years, and he’s (moving on from UW Oshkosh). ‘Any job prospects?’ I asked.

He said, 'I just want to shoot.' I said, 'Well, there's not an MBA or anything like that, but the Army has a Marksmanship Unit down in Ft. Benning, Ga.'"

McPhail, an Army Staff Sgt., earned the bronze medal in the World Cup London in April and subsequently qualified for the Olympics in a match at Ft. Benning for the Olympics. He subsequently finished 4th place at the World Cup Milan. He has previously earned medals at the Pan American Games in 2007 and 2011.

In his sport, competitive shooters lie down and zero in on a target 50 meters away, Bernarde said. Each bulls-eye is worth 10 points. There's a possible 600 points at stake, with 60 shots per round. The sport is scored electronically.

Bernarde said he hopes to watch his pupil compete online. Websites for the National Rifle Association and "Shooting USA," the Olympic governing body are expected to live stream McPhail's competition on Aug. 3, Bernarde said.

For the coach and rifle team adviser who began working with student-sharpshooters 28 years ago, Bernarde is, not surprisingly, proud of the first Olympian to come out of the UW Oshkosh program.

"They don't usually come out of D3 schools," he said.

"He's a great kid," Bernarde said. "Ambition and desire and drive would sum him up in a heartbeat."

Learn more:

- [Michael McPhail, USA Shooting Team profile](#)
- [UW Oshkosh Rifle Team](#)
- [USA Shooting](#)