





# The Art of the Comeback: *Abbey Ristow*

A serious knee injury was not going to stop her from achieving greatness

BY LAANNA CARRASCO, MA

**W**hat other athletes may call extra work, Abbey Ristow calls opportunity,” says BFS program coach Chad Whalen of Ellsworth High School in Wisconsin.

Enduring athletic energy, sheer intelligence – both are fitting accolades for 2012 Wisconsin State Champion discus thrower Abbey Ristow. They are also words that have been used

competing in multiple track and field events. Ristow not only won the discus state championship with a personal best of 129'4", but did so four months to the day after she had surgery to repair a torn ACL and meniscus!

With single-minded focus, Ristow worked with physical therapist Amy Nemeo to rehabilitate her knee and

was Ristow's strength coach, know that the success she had after coming back from her injury was influenced by the four-plus years of hard work she had put in using the BFS program. Ellsworth High did a BFS clinic at the end of Ristow's eighth-grade year and she caught the weightlifting bug.

“I noticed the intensity and focus in her workouts right away,” says

*“She did everything she was supposed to do no matter how long it took. She was a machine.”*

—Chad Whalen

to describe the ancient Greek statue Discobolus, one of the earliest images of the strength, power, and rhythm required to throw the discus.

“I like how quick the discus is, and I like that I feel that I have to be fast and athletic to throw it,” says Ristow, who is just starting her freshman year at Winona State University in Minnesota. She has a full athletic scholarship and will throw the discus and study engineering.

It's hard to identify one thing that is most impressive about Ristow, who was a three-sport athlete at Ellsworth High School in Ellsworth, Wisconsin, playing basketball and volleyball (she was a first team all-conference volleyball player), and

build back her strength after her injury. She wanted to prove wrong a lot of people who thought she wouldn't come back to compete again during high school.

“I've spent my whole high school career working towards the one goal of a state championship. After my injury when so many people were telling me the injury was the end, I kept telling myself that ‘everything happens for a reason.’ I never truly believed it until I won the state meet,” Ristow says. It was the extra time she put in getting strong and perfecting her throwing technique that helped her get to the top of the podium.

Both Ristow and Whalen, a physical education teacher at Ellsworth who

Whalen as he points out Ristow's dedication. “She did everything she was supposed to do no matter how long it took. She was a machine.”

Young athletes who want to be competitive and win a college scholarship can use Ristow as a model of what to do to achieve their goals. Being a go-getter and working hard will help; however, one factor that set Ristow apart was that she had a balanced training program such as BFS in which she could apply her physical energies. Coach Whalen sums up the benefit of general preparation in the weightroom: “Through the BFS program, Abbey doesn't just hope she'll improve, she *knows* it.”

Ristow says she's always had a lot of

goals, and from her first exposure to the BFS program after eighth grade she saw strength training as an outlet where she could work hard to achieve those goals. “BFS was the way to go,” Ristow says. Lifting has made her mentally strong, just as it has benefited her physically – “I’m always reminding myself of my goals, which makes me work physically harder.”

Ristow’s favorite lifts are the squat (her squat PR is 175 pounds) and the power clean (PR is 125 pounds), so you know she likes to work hard. Both are smart lifts for a discus thrower because they train the whole body to produce maximal power. Of course, Ristow wasn’t training for power during most

of the four months after her surgery. She spent her time rehabilitating her leg with full-range-of-motion bodyweight exercises in addition to some lower-body isolation exercises such as leg extensions and leg curls.

Coach Whalen agrees that part of the reason Ristow came back from her injury so fast was that she was in such good shape from years of strength training. At Ellsworth the BFS program helps prevent outbreaks of “injury bugs” – times when a lot of athletes are plagued with injuries.

### The BFS Experience

At Ellsworth the students have an

outstanding foundation of physical strength and structural balance provided by the BFS program, but even more exciting is that getting into the weightroom is becoming the “in” thing to do. BFS has inspired a social culture in the gym where training and working hard is the cool way to get active during physical education classes. “We have an ‘if you build it, we will come work out’ type of mentality,” Whalen says. “There’s the attitude that ‘everyone else is working out, so I should too!’”

Ristow has always exhibited hard work and dedication – Whalen would often see her before school shooting



Ristow overcame a serious knee injury through a sound weight training program and great coaching.





Volleyball photo: Karolyn Campbell

Ristow is a multisport athlete who also excels in track and volleyball.

baskets in the gym before she suffered her ACL injury. After her surgery, Ristow was always in the pool or weightroom working to rehabilitate her knee.

Once she was cleared to start throwing the discus, Ristow began with modified “power” throws from a standstill. Ristow didn’t do a full discus spin until right before the state meet, which just hints at what we will see from Ristow in college when she is able to train for maximal power and acceleration!

Ristow has distinct goals for her track and field career at Winona State: She’s looking to reach the podium at the NCAA championships and would like to be named an All-American – both are reasonable goals with the state title under her belt and her 3.96 GPA. Ristow knows where she’s headed in her professional career in engineering as well. She’s majoring in a special field called Composite Materials Engineering, which will allow her to work to develop better sporting goods such as a discus that

will go farther because it is more aerodynamic.

Ristow is inspired by other female athletes who have overcome physical adversity and injury to be the best. Her favorite book is *Soul Surfer*, a true story about a surfer girl who lost her arm in a shark attack and came back to be a pro championship surfer.

Ristow’s favorite Olympic athlete

is discus thrower Stephanie Brown Trafton, who won gold at the 2008 Olympics and competed (but did not medal) in the London Games. Brown Trafton also tore her ACL in high school and has since transformed herself into one of the most powerful throwers in the world. Similarly, Ristow has shown she can rise above injury to be a champion! **BFS**



Ristow with her support network at Ellsworth HS (l-r): strength coaches Chad Whalen and Rich Powers, and head volleyball coach Tanya Powers.

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