

As a freshman in college, Brian has thrown 53 feet in the shot put and 170 feet in the discus.

Brian Wilhelm: Rising Shot Put Star

BY BRUCE WILHELM



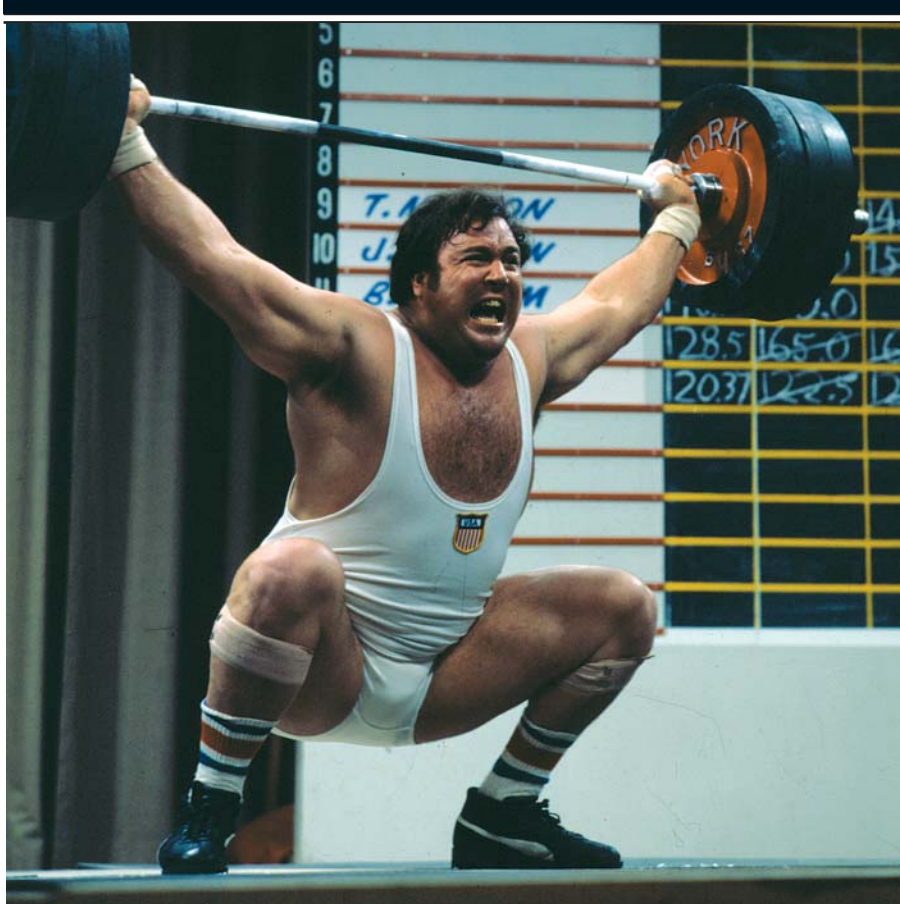
There's a legacy of strength in the Wilhelm family

Bruce Wilhelm was the first American to snatch 400 pounds, a lift that only three other US athletes have accomplished. He competed in the 1976 Olympics in weightlifting, was an alternate on the 1972 Olympic team in the shot put, and won the World's Strongest Man title not once, but twice. That's a hard act to follow, but his son Brian appears to be doing just that.

Bruce never expected his son to become interested in throwing the shot and the discus, especially after spending eight years playing basketball. But, as Bruce says, "Better late

than never." To date, Brian's best throws as a freshman in college are 53 feet in the shot and 160 feet in the discus, but in training he has thrown over 55 and 170, respectively. He has also done 264 pounds in the snatch, 352 pounds in the power clean and jerk, 507 in the back squat and 440 in the front squat.

With the genetics and guidance of his father, we expect to see Brian continue his rapid rise in sports. BFS thought that our readers would love to hear about Brian. Bruce agreed, and we're certain you'll find Brian's story both fascinating and inspirational.



Bruce Wilhelm, Brian's father, was the first American to snatch 400 pounds. He competed in the 1976 Olympics in weightlifting and was an alternate on the 1972 Olympic Team in the shot put. (Photo by Bruce Klemens)

My son Brian was born in 1986, in August. He was large, but not overly so at 4.2 kilos. The reason I give his weight in kilos is that he was born in Nagoya, Japan. Brian's mother is Japanese, and she felt more comfortable having the baby born where Japanese is spoken.

As Brian grew up it looked like he was going to be more academic than athletic. He didn't seem to have any particular athletic interests, but one day my wife asked if I might want to go and watch Brian play basketball on his school team. I honestly didn't have any inkling that he had been doing any sport, and so you can imagine what a surprise it was for me to see him in a basketball uniform playing ball! I was truly impressed when I watched him play and move. Now I was really a fan

and began attending all his games.

This went on for several years and, as of course everyone knows, basketball had become the hugest sport going. Everyone played ball; that is, everyone except me. Brian got better and got taller, but never tall enough to be center. He played forward and got awards for Most Valuable and Most Improved. His dream was to go to Saint Ignatius College Preparatory, which had a tremendous basketball reputation in the Bay Area. Not only did they have a good team, but this was a tough Jesuit school – very academic.

Brian started as a freshman and was named Most Improved. He was also

Brian's first love was basketball, and in his freshman year at Saint Ignatius College Preparatory he was a starting forward.

awarded Most Valuable on the JV team as a sophomore. At this time he was obsessed with dunking the ball, but he just didn't have the spring needed. I suggested lifting weights, but he didn't have that much confidence in what the weight training could do – it just seemed to him like a waste of time.

At this time Brian was over 6 feet tall and 170 pounds. As a junior he got even taller and moved even faster. He made the varsity squad. The team started off the fall year and Brian still couldn't dunk. I told him I'd bet him \$1,000 that if he worked up to back squatting 140 kilos, or 308 pounds, for 5 reps, that he'd be able to dunk. He took me up on it.

During the actual season, people could see that he was getting bigger and that his legs were getting much larger. He was also able to drive through other players and lift them off the floor. His speed also improved. But the main thing was that he was able to dunk the ball. He could do it forward and backwards.



This was a huge turning point for him, as he now knew that the weights really did work.

It was like magic that he could go from so-so jumping to jumping like a gazelle. The added strength that he picked up from upper-body work also enabled him to drive up through much larger athletes and leave them in the dust. Basketball today is nothing like it was 30 years ago. If you can't push back, you are going nowhere and most likely you'll get run over.

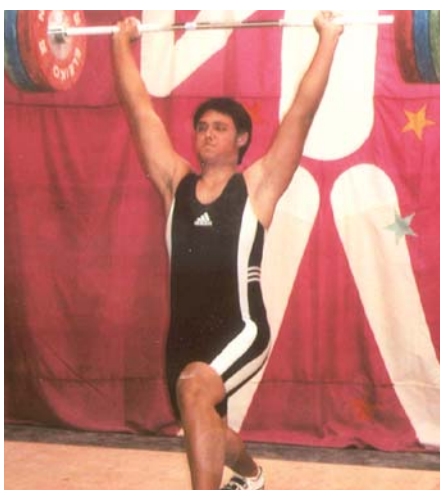
Brian's team went all the way to the NorCal playoffs, but lost to Bishop O'Dowd of Oakland, California – nothing to be ashamed of at all. Next up for Brian was track. Without any practice, he broke his PRs in his first meet with a 47-foot toss in shot put and 121 feet in the discus. The next seven weeks were like *The Twilight Zone*. He just kept getting better and better, and no one,

I'd bet him \$1,000 that if he worked up to back squatting 308 pounds for 5 reps that he'd be able to dunk.

—BRUCE WILHELM

including me, could believe what we were seeing.

But the handwriting was on the wall, as he had warmed up at the Mt. Sac relays in Southern California before the rain started and actually threw 54 feet warming up, then made 51 feet 9 inches in the competition. Certainly not world-record breaking, but quite good for a part-time thrower. At the WCAL Championship he won the shot with 55 feet 5 inches and spun the discus 156 feet. Next he went to the NCS Trials, just qualifying with a miserable 52 feet. He was too busy watching the other competitors, especially a couple of athletes who had thrown over 60 feet. He refocused for the finals and surprised every-



Brian competed in his first Olympic lifting competition on October 30, 2004, where he did 237 pounds in the snatch and 319 pounds in the clean and jerk.

one, including me, by winning with 56 feet 10 inches, barely fouling with 58 feet 4 inches. He didn't do as well in the discus, missing the cut for the finals.

Now Brian was really psyched

because he had made it to the state meet. The Monday before the state championships he hit 59 feet 2 inches in training – he was finally beginning to believe. When we went to the state meet, Brian looked OK warming up, easily hitting 50-foot plus from a stand. Now you have to remember that he's a spinner and you can easily pick up 9 or 10 feet on the spin, so we were looking for 59 to 60 feet. But he had a miserable day; he just tried too hard and hit a lousy 54 feet for 12th place. Very depressing, but this was his first experience at this level.

Brian is shown here pushing 451 pounds. Squats are a core lift in Brian's program. His best are 507 in the back squat and 440 in the front squat.

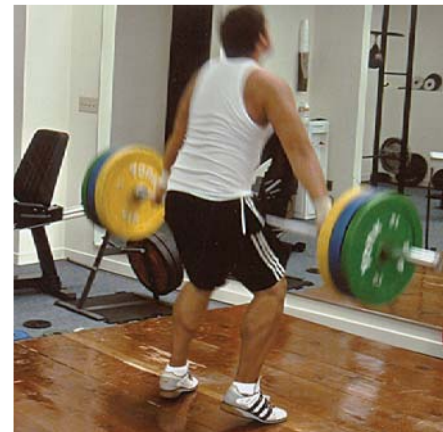
Next came the big decision: What was he going to do in college – track or basketball? He had already applied to several colleges with the idea of playing basketball, but after having such a great track season, he thought that maybe he would head off in another direction. And that he did, enrolling at College of San Mateo in San Mateo, California, to be coached by the great Mike Lewis. Mike was quite an athlete in his own time, having set the high school record with the collegiate discus. After he retired from the fire department, Mike spent a great deal of time coaching budding young weight men.

Brian and Mike hit it off from the start and spent many long days training. I watched over his weight training, and Mike handled the throwing and technique. During the year 2004-2005 Brian competed in many dual meets and ended up with a best toss of 53 feet with the 16-pound shot, and 160 feet in the discus. It's hard to say which mark is better, but they should both be short-lived, as Brian has thrown the discus over 170 feet in training, and 55 feet in the shot. Now I know that a lot of you are saying, "Those aren't such great marks for a freshman – lots of guys have done better." But the truth of the matter is that those marks came after Brian changed over to the 16-pound shot and the much heavier discus. In addition, his body-weight increased from 200 to 245 during





Brian performs the towel bench press for upper body power.



In the quick lifts, Brian's bests in training are 264 pounds in the snatch and 352 pounds in the clean and jerk. Here he is shown snatching 242 pounds.

the season, so there were many adjustments to be made with the additional weight gain plus the strength gains.

Jim Schmitz, former Olympic Team lifting coach, convinced Brian to enter his first, and so far only, Olympic lifting contest. He lifted in the 231-class and made 6 for 6. Not bad for a start. He also set a then-PR in the snatch of 237, and 319 in the clean and jerk. I have to say that his performance was pretty good. He power cleaned 286 and 308 on his first two attempts, and then went to 319 and squat cleaned it and jerked it. I was amazed and proud.

That was the only lifting meet he entered last year, but his lifts continued to go up. Here are his best training PRs:

Bench press	. . . . .	.375 x 1, 335 x 5
Incline press	. . . . .	.305 x 1
Military press	. . . . .	.231 x 3
Front squat	. . . . .	.440, 400 x 5
Back squat	. . . . .	.507, 451 x 5
Snatch	. . . . .	.264
Power clean and jerk	. . . . .	.352

Brian is now in his second year of college, having transferred to the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He is really psyched to throw this year, and there is a multitude of talent there to push him, including two juniors who have thrown over 62 feet. I know that being in a situation where he is around good throwers is going to have a huge impact on his performance.

Brian's bodyweight has risen to

around 260, so now the focus is going to be a matter of getting stronger and faster. This will happen. It takes time, but he is under good coaching and the history of USC track is second to none.

Brian has the capacity to do both the shot put and weightlifting, but in reality it is impractical to do both at the same time because the two disciplines can work against each other. Many great athletes have tried, and they have failed. Only time will tell where Brian is going to drive his interest, but I will watch with great curiosity as this great former basketball player now remakes himself into a great weight man. If you knew Brian Wilhelm like I do, you wouldn't bet against him. **BFS**



The Wilhelm family vacationing in Japan: Yumi, Brian, Bruce and Jenny.



Brian is currently attending USC, which is known for its outstanding track program.

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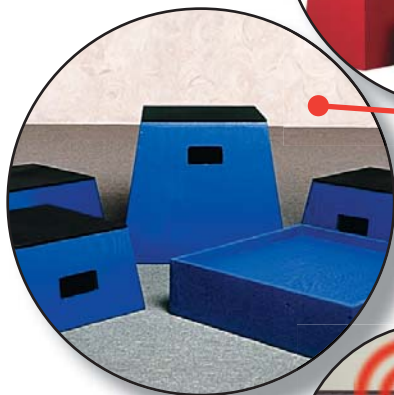
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