

Michelle Carter

by Sieg Lindstrom

Another last-round comethrough made Carter the first U.S. woman ever to win Olympic shot gold



Bringing her best when it mattered most, Michelle Carter took the 2016 Olympic season and made it the year of “Carter Comes Through” in the women’s shot.

Her AR-raising win at the Games wasn’t just historic—the first for a U.S. woman, also making her just the second American after Earlene Brown in ’58 to World Rank No. 1—it was edge-of-your-seat stuff.

Carter, 2nd to 2-time defender Valerie Adams from round 2 to climactic round 6—where Hungary’s Anita Márton briefly bumped her to bronze—stepped into the circle as the penultimate thrower and launched the longest heave of her life (67-8¼/20.63) to take the lead. Adams couldn’t produce a topper and the gold was Carter’s.

She had won the World Indoor crown in March and the Olympic Trials in July with the same brand

of final flourish, but said in Rio, “That is definitely not my goal.

“You always try to come out in the beginning and throw far but in practice you always want to end it with a good throw and I think that’s been working for me in the competitions, just knowing I can pull it together on my last throw and give it my all.”

For Carter—the daughter of ’84 shot silver medalist Michael Carter, who also played nose tackle on 3 San Francisco 49ers Super Bowl winners... and coaches Michelle—her “Sweet ’16” followed a string of health woes she rarely talked about:

Hypothyroidism in 2010–13 induced deep fatigue, uncontrolled weight gain and other symptoms. “My hair would fall out, my skin was

Carter In A Nutshell

- **Personal:** Michelle Denee Carter was born October 12, 1985, in San José, California; 5-8¼/236 (1.75/107)
- **PRs:** SP—67-8¼/20.63 AR, 66-3¼/20.21i AR; DT—177-4/54.06 '07
- **Schools:** Red Oak, Texas, HS '03; Texas '07; now represents Nike
- **Coaches:** Michael Carter high school & pro, Rose Brimmer college
- **Major Meets:** 2)WY '01; 3)USJ '02; 1)USJ '03; 12)NCi; nq)NC, 1)USJ, 1)WJ '04; 2)NCi, 2)NC, 2)US '05; 1)NCi, 3)NC, 5)US '06; 2)NCi, 6)NC, 5)US '07; 1)OT, 15)OG '08; 1)US, 9)WC '09; 2)USi, nq)WIC, 2)US '10; 1)US, 9)WC '11; 2)USi, 3)WIC; 2)US, 6)OG '12; 1)USi, 1)US, 4)WC '13; 1)USi, 1)US '14; 1)USi, 1)US, 3)WC '15; 1)USi, 1)WIC, 1)OT, 1)OG '16
- **World/U.S. Rankings:** '05—x/2 '05; '06—x/5; '07—x/6; '08—x/1; '09—7/1; '10—x/2; '11—9/2; '12—5/2; '13—4/1; '14—4/1; '15—3/1; '16—1/1

really bad, I was always bloated and always swollen because my body wasn't processing the same. I held on to water and it was just a rough time. My muscles wouldn't maintain strength. I had to always stay in the weight room because if I'd miss a day or two, I'd lose strength that fast."

Then in '14 came a torn hip labrum, in '15 a dislocated shoulder, and in spring of the Olympic year a herniated disk in her back.

No wonder Carter, now injury-free at 31, believes her best still lies ahead. She spoke with T&FN shortly before the USATF Indoor Champs from her Dallas training base.

T&FN: Where do you find yourself today?

Carter: I'm training. I'm in between practices. Just got some food and about to head to my next practice session. I threw this morning and I'm getting ready to go lift some weights in a little bit.

T&FN: Has your gold medal opened new doors for you?

Carter: Yes, it has. My speaking engagements have really picked up and I've really been enjoying doing that—just encouraging people, adults and children, explaining how I've been working hard and how hard work pays off. And to never really give up on your dreams even if it doesn't happen the first two times.

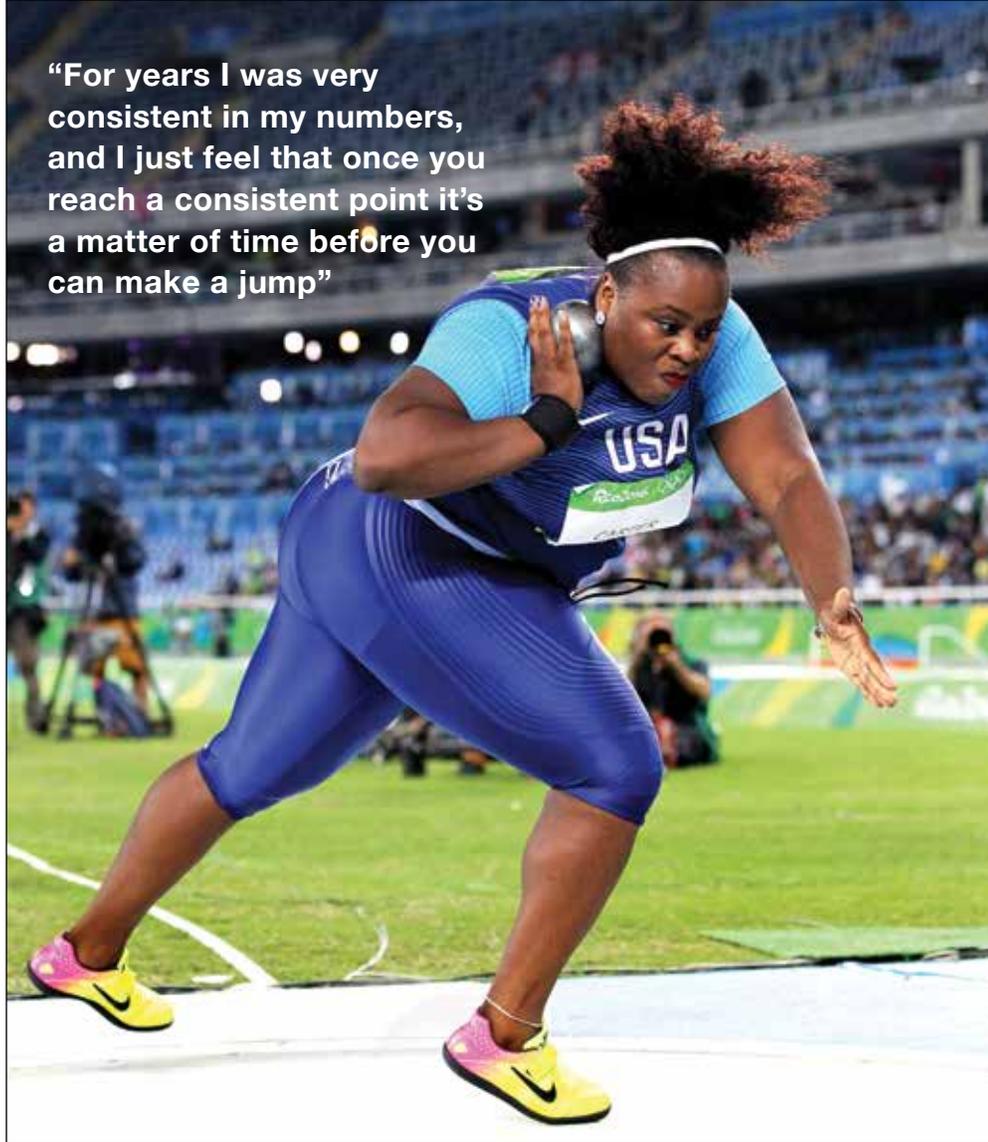
In October I got the chance to do a TED Women's talk. I did it with Alana Nichols, the [basketball & skiing] Paralympian. We had a really good time with that.

I've had a chance to be on a few TV shows, too: *The Chelsea Handler Show* and I had an appearance on *The Bachelor* and I was also on *The Rachael Ray Show*. I did a live makeover on her show.

T&FN: You also have an interest in business?

Carter: I definitely have an interest in fashion and the beauty world. So one of my

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MARK SHERMAN

goals is to help with an athletic line for larger women because athletes come in all shapes and sizes. Just having those options for larger women so we can feel great when we work out is awesome.

And I'm getting ready to have my You

Throw Girl Confidence Camp. It will be for junior high and high school girls and it's going to be here in Dallas. The first one will be this spring; we'll see how this first one plays.

T&FN: You recently retweeted a post from miler Andrew Wheating. "Never seen me race?" he wrote.

Struggles At Early Age

Michelle Carter asserts the tenacity that earned her Olympic gold owes something to her struggles since childhood with ADHD and dyslexia.

Carter: Actually, you always have those issues. It never goes away, you just learn how to cope with them. So I partner with an organization called understood.org. It's a website that has free information, tools and tips, for parents and even adults and kids with learning issues.

Sometimes it's frustrating. For me, sitting down for a long time and trying to read a book is still a challenge but as an adult I know that I do have to get this done so I'm able to focus a little bit more. Or I know that I can break it up. I don't have to sit there and read for a whole hour, I can spend 15 minutes, take a break, come back and read

another 15 minutes.

T&FN: Has shot putting helped you at all with that? Or vice versa?

Carter: Yes, it has. If I'm reading and the words are just not looking the same on the page, I know that I can make adjustments to finish my project. I do think about those hard practices when I'm tired and I really don't want to do this. I know it's best for me and I can make the decision to do it.

In elementary school I would go to tutoring 4 days a week for an hour with a specialist for reading, writing and math. That helped a lot because she was able to give me tips and tools.

Also I had my mom and my dad being patient with me when I didn't want to do it and was sitting at the table till midnight being stubborn. They were able to be there with me and stay on it; they wouldn't let me slide.

They'd say, "OK, Michelle, you're different, it may take a bit longer. You can do it but you

have to make the decision to focus on it and get it done."

They kind of put the responsibility on me by letting me know I had what it takes to get it done.

I never took medications for my ADHD and dyslexia. I just really had to push myself and put myself in great situations to help me be the best that I could be.

As an athlete at Texas, your freshman year you have to be in study hall. I stayed in study hall all the way until I graduated because I knew that I needed that time to sit down in a quiet room with my tutor or whomever I needed to help me, or just have that quiet time working by myself. Because once you get to your room, your friends come by, the TV's there, you can get distracted.

I knew that about myself so I always set myself up with situations to help me and not hurt me.

Carter — continued

“Well, it’s a bit like this...” and the drawing attached was of a giraffe running with and towering over a pack of zebras, gazelles and wildebeests.

Carter: Yeah. Sometimes you look at an athlete and you can’t always tell what they do. But everybody’s not going to look like a cheetah.

I probably look like a rhino or hippopotamus running but I’m fast, I can get the job done. You just have to embrace that, knowing where you are and it’s OK. You may look different from the others but it’s OK.

T&FN: *You had great success early: a High School Record, you reached 60-10¾ (18.56) indoors as a Texas soph but then it took 7 more seasons to get over 20m and 66ft in ‘13. Then 3 more years to breach 67ft in Rio. That’s a decade of perseverance. What was it like to go through that?*

Carter: A lot of it was I just had to grow up. Early on I had a lot of success because I was just naturally talented. Natural talent can take you a long way but when you’re just naturally talented and everybody else is working hard, and you’re not working that hard, people tend to catch up with you.

That’s when I had to realize that I need to learn how to work hard. So that was a little bit of a struggle—especially when a lot of things were so easy. Now to take it to the next level is not as easy anymore.

I have to be even more detail-oriented in my technique, making sure I do all of my workouts and just having the integrity, not just to my coach but the integrity to myself, that I’m doing what it takes to get to the next level. And also understanding that you have to be consistent. And just because you’re consistent doesn’t mean it’s going to pay off right away.

For years I was very consistent in my numbers, and I just feel that once you reach a consistent point it’s a matter of time before you can make a jump. Then you have to dig down just a little bit deeper and figure out what else can you do to take it to the next level. That’s

was it more a matter of steady work?

Carter: There was nothing really big. The biggest thing for me that was a really hard transition was just learning how to reverse in the shot put. That took some time and some effort and some years of trying to put it together.

T&FN: *If I remember correctly, when you first took up throwing you had no idea your dad was an Olympic silver medalist?*

Carter: No, I had no idea because I grew up with my dad playing football. That’s what I knew; I was born the year after his track career. So when I came to him with it, he knew that I didn’t know and he said that he never wanted to force anything that he’s done or accomplished in his life on us.

But if we chose to do it, then he wanted to be sure that it was our choice and our choice alone.

He questioned me up and down to make sure that no one was trying to tell me what to do because they knew what he did.

T&FN: *With a gold medal yours, have your circumstances changed outside of training?*

Carter: I actually just bought a house. I was living with my parents all through until last year. Then I finally was able to get my own house. But my dad is my coach so I still see him pretty much every day.

I’m pretty much throwing 5-6 days a week so he’s always there; I can’t get rid of him.

T&FN: *What’s the athletic plan for this year?*

Carter: Of course I want to be better than I was last year. I’m just working on my technique, trying to get stronger,

faster. I’m trying to lose a little bit of weight this year, see how my body reacts, and just get in better condition.

Those last three years I’ve had injuries that kept me from being in shape like I would like to be.

T&FN: *You’re not injured now. Does that mean you can do more in training?*

Carter: Now I’m just easing back into the dynamic workouts, jumping over hurdles, medicine balls, box jumps and things of that nature that I couldn’t do the last 3 years. Sprinting; I’m actually pretty fast and I miss it, so I’m glad that I’m able to get back into that.

T&FN: *Maybe you’ll run on the U.S. 4x4.*

Carter: The sprinters always joke that if nobody else can run the 4x1 they’ll put me on. □

“Learning how to reverse. That took some time and some effort and some years of trying to put it together.”



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what I had to figure out for myself. Just playing around with different things I was able to figure some things out that got me to that next level.

T&FN: *You certainly dug down at the right times in ‘16. With your dad as coach all along the way, did you ever try anything radically new or*

Father Knows Best?

Michelle Carter has been coached by her father Michael ever since she first picked up a shot. An Olympic medalist dad is one heckuva resource. But the relationship is not always conflict-free.

Carter: Oh, no. I tell people, “My daddy gets on my nerves like everybody else’s daddy gets on their nerves.” But I know that he wants what’s best for me. Even though we may get mad at each other, at the end of the day we have to forgive each other and move forward.

T&FN: *Do you ever watch the grainy video of his phenomenal High School Record?*

Carter: I do. I wish the technology was better back then so we could really look at it and break it down even more.

T&FN: *What throwers do you watch on video as models?*

Carter: Of course my dad is one of them. I look at Al Feuerbach’s films and Udo Beyer. I do watch quite a few people’s different films.

T&FN: *You’re a glider. Have you ever experimented with rotational throwing?*

Carter: No. The only time I ever experiment with it is when I’m showing kids how. They’re surprised that I even know how to do it but I say, “I was a discus thrower. I can figure it out.”