

# Ryan Whiting

by Jon Hendershott

**B**y successfully defending his World Indoor shot title, Ryan Whiting became only the second American ever to win multiple titles undercover. Christian Cantwell won in '04, '08 and '10.

For the 27-year-old Arizona State grad, the triumph in Sopot followed his third USATF Indoor title in the last four seasons. A 6-time NCAA champion for the Sun Devils, Whiting earned his first No. 1 World and U.S. Rankings last year.

The global indoor win is a good indicator of longer throws to come, he told us as the outdoor season gears up:

**T&FN:** First, congratulations on defending.

**Whiting:** Yeah, it was nice to put all my eggs in one basket as far as a championship this year and peak at the Worlds. I was lucky enough to get through a tough USAs and go on to win in Poland.

**T&FN:** What made Albuquerque so tough?

**Whiting:** Both Kurt Roberts and Joe Kovacs had personal bests, indoors or out. So I had to step up and throw farther than I thought I would have to.

**T&FN:** But did that win give you a good indication of where you were strengthwise and formwise going into Poland?

**Whiting:** It definitely told me I was in shape or on the way to getting there. I still feel like I should have thrown farther in Poland, but I won so I can't really argue with that.

**T&FN:** Is there any carry-over from indoor competition to outdoors? Or is it back to square 1 for outdoors?

**Whiting:** There's definitely carryover. I think that this year is a little different, though, without an outdoor Worlds. I think that how I throw indoors shows I'm going to be in shape.

I know how to do this now. I don't plan on making it easy for anyone to win any Diamond League meets.

**T&FN:** So with no outdoor championship, the Diamond League does become the big aim?

**Whiting:** It does, mainly because now the winner of the Diamond League from one year can get an automatic pass to the next year's World Championships. So that makes the Diamond League very important.

**T&FN:** Between winning your first World Indoor title in '12 and defending this year, how would you say you have changed as a thrower?

**Whiting:** I would say I have matured mentally—a lot. Physically, I'm a little stronger but not a whole lot. I've just learned a lot from the big meets where I didn't do so well, like the Olympics.

I brought that experience into 2013. I was extremely consistent last year but I ended up losing in Moscow to David [Storl of Germany]. That experience taught me how to go in favored but not let my foot off the gas. That's what I did in Poland. If I expected to win, I knew I was going to have to earn it.

**T&FN:** Something else you did was stay in the arena after you had qualified to help Kurt Roberts, who was on his first U.S. team. Is that another way you have changed and matured, by helping the newer guys?

**Whiting:** Definitely.

Reese [Hffa] and Christian did the same thing for me. Reese was on my first Indoor team in '12 and he qualified on his first throw. Then he gave me some advice to help me out.

It definitely was a lot easier this time and I wanted to help pass that along to Kurt. Then the next time he is in the situation, he won't have any issues.

**T&FN:** Even though you're trying to beat everyone, it seems like there is generally a positive atmosphere among the throwers.

**Whiting:** It definitely is. I thought it was going to be different when I first went pro. I thought it was going to be more hostile, especially toward me as the new guy; the up-and-comer taking stuff out of their pockets.

But they really just genuinely want shot putting to move forward. Reese called it "passing the baton to the next generation" and he said he will be comfortable making that pass when he finally does retire.

**T&FN:** Men's head coach Nat Page said afterward that your performance "gave our team something to get truly excited about." Did you know about that praise?

**Whiting:** I didn't hear that but that was kind of my goal again. It was similar in '12 in that I was the first one to win. I'm only

## Whiting In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** Ryan Keith Whiting was born November 24, 1986, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; 6-3/305 (1.91/138)

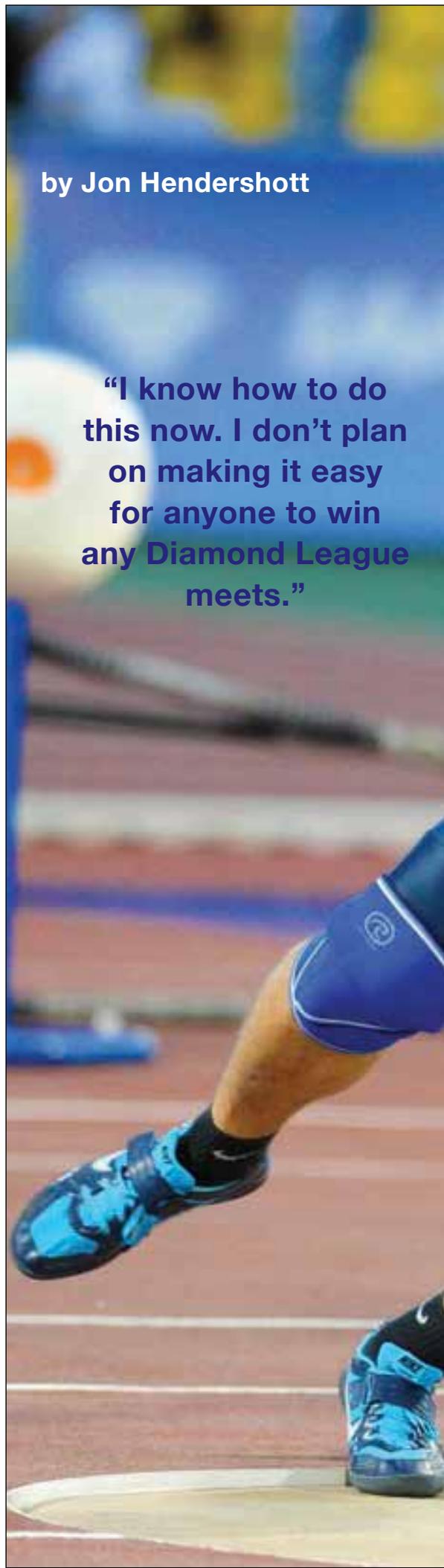
•**PRs:** SP—73-1¼ (22.28) '13 (11, x W; 7, x A); DT—200-6 (61.11) '08

•**Schools:** Central Dauphin HS (Harrisburg) '05; Arizona State '10; now represents Nike

•**Coaches:** Glenn Thompson, Mike Sage (Dauphin); David Dumble (Arizona St); Pat Ebel (pro); Cam Davidson (strength)

•**Major Meets:** SP—1)USJ '05; 18)US '06; 3)NCi, 4)NC, 15)US '07; 1)NCi, 2)NC, 6)OT '08; 1)NCi, 1)NC, 9)US '09; 2)USi, 1)NCi, 1)NC, 5)US '10; 1)USi, 4)US, 6)WC '11; 2)USi, 1)WCI, 2)OT, 9)OG '12; 1)USi, 1)US, 2)WC '13; 1)USi, 1)WCI '14. DT—2)USJ '05; 13)US '06; 9)NC '08; 2)NC, 18)US '09; 1)NC '10

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** SP—x, 10 '07; x, 5 '08; x, 8 '09; 8, 4 '10; 6, 3 '11; 3, 2 '12; 1, 1 '13. DT—x, 7 '09; x, 10 '10.



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27, but it felt like a really young team to me this year. So setting the tone like that would help them get off on the right foot.

**T&FN:** *Did you learn anything special from the Worlds competition?*

**Whiting:** I executed pretty well, since David and I went back and forth three times with the lead. I was lucky enough to come out on top. The fact I was able to respond well to David gives me a lot more confidence going into similar situations now.

**T&FN:** *What else have you learned from your experiences at the Worlds and Olympics? In fact, to not take your foot off the gas?*

**Whiting:** Yes because it really doesn't matter how good your shape is. I saw Reese in '12 and, in my opinion, he was the best shot putter in the world that year. But it just didn't happen for him at the biggest meet. So it has helped me in that way to watch other guys.

**T&FN:** *Have you always used the spin style?*

**Whiting:** Yes. I went over to the spin from the glide in my soph year of high school. So there wasn't any big adjustment to make.

**T&FN:** *How did you get started in track in general and the shot in particular? Did your size direct you toward the throws?*

**Whiting:** It did. I was pretty big even in junior high school. I didn't like running, but a friend in eighth grade wanted me to come out for track. I did and took to the throws right away. I won my first meet, so it was pretty natural. I played football just one year.

**T&FN:** *When did you "become" a shot putter, when the event really grabbed hold of you?*

**Whiting:** Once I met Glenn Thompson, throwing became really ingrained and I knew it's what I wanted to do. I was always a very independent person and I liked the fact that in the shot, you get out of it what you put into it—the reward for the work you put in.

And it's individual. I didn't like football because even if I carried out my assignment, someone else could screw up and the play would be dead. But in track, you depend on yourself.

**T&FN:** *It's central in your life right now, but has anything else helped make the shot so important?*

**Whiting:** Throwing in general was always pretty easy for me. I always loved seeing how far I could make things go. But the shot is just something that I feel I have a lot better feel for than most people. It's hard to describe; hard to pin down. But it just feels like a natural thing to me.

**T&FN:** *More than the discus?*

**Whiting:** Yes, definitely. I love the discus; I love seeing it glide out there. But it never came close to the shot for me. In high school, I liked the discus more than in college. But the shot really took over in college.

**T&FN:** *But then as a college senior, you first won the NCAA discus before you defended your shot title.*

**Whiting:** [laughs] Yeah, I snuck in there. I almost did it my junior year also. I thought about picking up the disc again, but it's just

## Whiting — continued

hard to justify because of the risk of injury. An injury in the discus obviously takes away from the shot.

**T&FN:** *What kind of injuries have you had in the shot over your career?*

**Whiting:** They have been lifting-related. That's definitely the toughest part of our sport. I also have an ongoing elbow issue, just from the hyperextension in the throw. Violently extending my arm like that a bunch of times a week. It's an overuse type of thing.

**T&FN:** *The age-old puzzle of doing enough training and lifting to be ready to compete, yet not going over the red line and ending up injured?*

**Whiting:** That's one thing Adam Nelson taught me: train smart. The extra 2% you do in training that could get you injured isn't going to benefit you in the circle. You don't have to get even close to the edge to benefit. The aspect of being healthy just completely overrides that.

**T&FN:** *You left home in Pennsylvania to go to college at Arizona State. Was that a difficult step or did it turn out to be so critical to your development that it was easy to do?*

**Whiting:** I established pretty early with my parents that I wanted to go south when I picked a college. We were always a really close family and my folks didn't want me to go that

### Whiting The Hobbyist

*In a USATF profile, Ryan Whiting revealed some unique hobbies: knitting, doing origami and exploring tunnels. Does he still do all those things?*

**[laughs]:** Not really. The knitting actually happened a lot when I was in high school. When I went to Arizona, it kind of faded off—mainly because it was too hot to wear anything you would ever knit.

"In high school, the same friend who got me into track was an art student and a graphic design major. He knitted and taught me and then I actually taught my mom. She took it and ran with it.

"The origami was just a brief hobby. I looked at my ASU website stuff and it was up there. I'm sure I could still do it if you asked me to but I don't actively pursue it anymore.

"Exploring tunnels was when my college roommate, again Jason Lewis, and I were in the dorms one year right up to when they closed for the holidays. I dropped my phone down an elevator shaft and we ended up having to go into the basement.

"We found this series of tunnels under Arizona State. Miles and miles of tunnels connecting all the buildings. So we went from time to time and no one knew we went down there. Yeah, they will now! I'm sure a lot of people will try to get down there now.

"We would go down there for a couple of hours sometimes and just walk around. Come up above ground at random places. It was just a diversion from everything: school, training, throwing."

far away. But they knew I needed good weather if I was going to throw the discus all year, plus train well all year.

And they went on all my visits with me and they saw how it was so that made it okay with them. They knew they could pass me off to [ASU throws coach David] Dumble to look after me.

And there also was the team. They were like mother figures for me; just making sure I didn't do stupid things.

**T&FN:** *Was there almost a family feeling among the throwers at ASU?*

**Whiting:** We definitely were like a family. We did basically everything together. We all cared about each other. We all were pretty far from home except for ['09 NCAA weight champion] Jason Lewis, my main training partner. We commiserated with each other and they all took up the role of the family we left behind.

Jordan Clarke [four-time NCAA shot winner] and Jason and I are just like brothers, in the aggravating ways brothers can be but also in encouraging each other.

**T&FN:** *Something David does with many of ASU's frosh throwers is redshirt them in their first year. Get them used to college academics, as well as college-level training, lifting and throwing.*

*Was that a big help in your development?*

**Whiting:** If you look at my career and just move everything up one year, I would have won only 3 NCAA championships instead of 6.

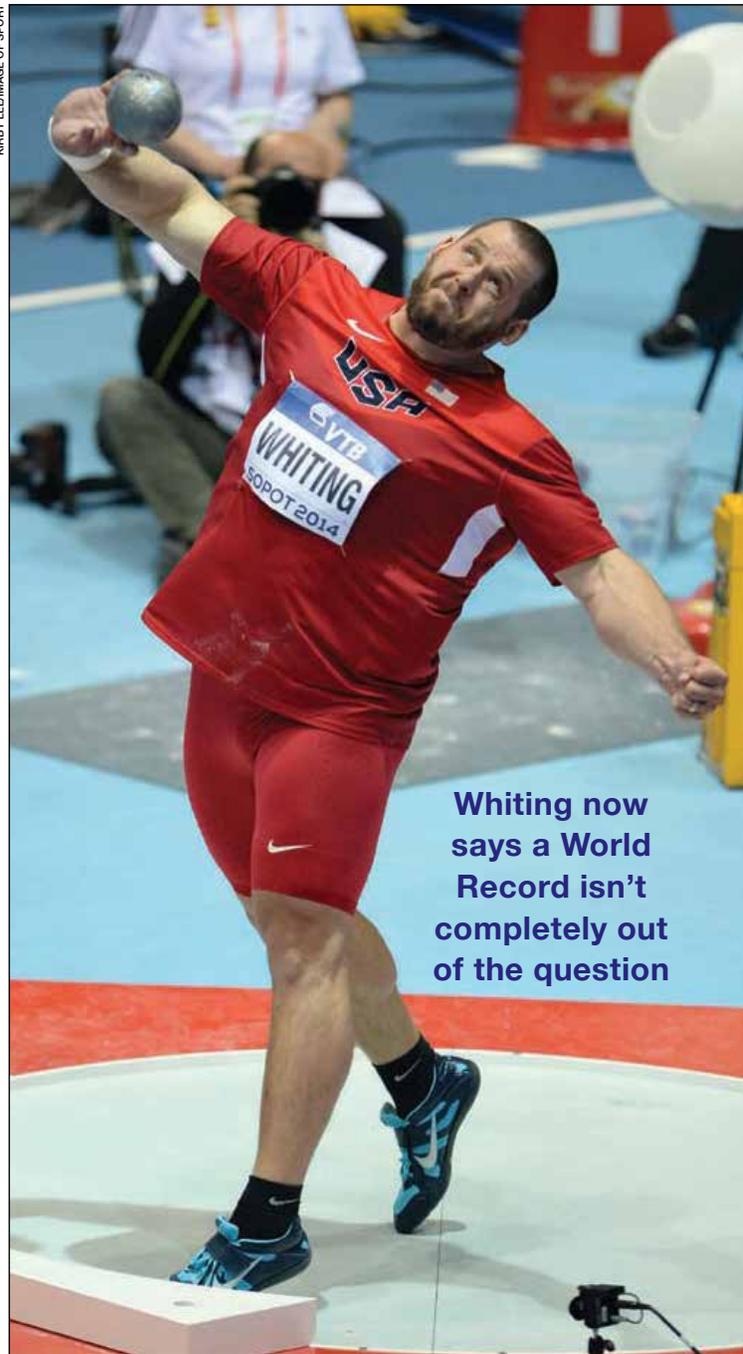
I would have come out of college right at 21.00 [68-10 $\frac{3}{4}$ ] due to various injuries, instead of right at 22.00 [72-2 $\frac{1}{4}$ ]. Once I got into the professional life, I was a lot more successful because of that little bit of extra time I had as a freshman.

**T&FN:** *Now that you are at the elite level, what becomes the motivator? Is there a specific distance you want to throw, or just win every meet or...?*

**Whiting:** The World Record

[75-10 $\frac{3}{4}$ /23.12]. I used to think it was pretty unrealistic for a clean thrower to be able to do that. Up until the last year, but then I threw distances in training that indicated to me I could do it. I got consistent enough that I

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**Whiting now says a World Record isn't completely out of the question**

really felt like the record isn't completely out of the question.

I think my throwing this year is telling me the same thing. Throwing 22.23 at USAs when I wasn't in completely perfect physical shape. I'm not going to say what I think I could have thrown at Worlds, but it would be getting up there. I'd say that's my goal distance-wise.

**T&FN:** *PR distance, then?*

**Whiting:** No. My goal is the World Record. For the next few years, that's it, without a question. □