



Mr. Big Shot

In the shot put, slow and steady win the race. Tell that to Kevin DiGiorgio.

At first glance, Kevin DiGiorgio seems like an average guy. As he begins his workout in the weight room of Hale Center, a baggy sweatshirt covers his 5' 9," 230-pound frame. He seems too small for football, too short for basketball, and too wide for soccer. The only hint that the Rutgers College freshman may be out of the ordinary is when he grabs a 610-pound bar off a rack, rests it on his shoulders, and dips into a squat.

"Kevin spends more time here than just about anybody," says James "Skip" Fuller, Rutgers' strength and conditioning coach. "Football players are discouraged from spending more than an hour a day lifting, but Kevin often lifts for two to three hours at a time. We have to keep an eye on him to make sure he doesn't overtrain."

Few athletes are as driven to succeed as DiGiorgio. Based on his freshman season alone, he is already the greatest shot-putter in Rutgers history. A few months into his collegiate career, he broke the Rutgers shot-put record by a foot, throwing 59 feet, one-quarter inch. The throw won him the IC4A indoor championships, which includes more than 100 schools. In the outdoor season, he won four individual meets and the Metropolitan Championships and finished third in the Big East Conference Championships. He also steadily improved throughout the season in a second event, the discus, finishing third in the Big East championships with a 169-foot throw, only five feet behind the winner.

DiGiorgio, who recently acquired the nickname "Hollywood" from his teammates after dying his hair blond and adopting a pair of imitation designer sunglasses, is a native of Bayonne

DIGIORGIO'S TYPICAL BREAKFAST: A CHEESE AND TOMATO OMELET, TWO BOWLS OF COOKIE CRISP CEREAL, ONE WAFFLE, TWO GLASSES EACH OF ORANGE JUICE AND MILK, ONE BANANA.

and the oldest of three brothers. He was first introduced to the shot put by his father, Dominick, who once threw the heavy metal ball as a high school student at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City. Says Kevin: "We had a shot put lying around the house, and one day we went to the park to throw it around, just like you would a baseball."

After the father-and-son toss, Dominick suspected his son could excel at the shot put with a little guidance. "As a kid I would hit 57 feet, and I wouldn't even win the county championship," says Dominick. "I saw in the newspaper where kids were winning with 45-, 46-foot throws. I said to Kevin, 'Go into this sport. I'll teach you how to do it. I know you'll be the county champ at least.'"

DiGiorgio took his father's advice and gave up ninth-grade football and wrestling to concentrate on the shot put. The following year he exceeded even his dad's expectations by winning not only the county championship, but placing first in the NJSIAA state championships and fifth in the national championships. He came back in his junior year to win the national indoor championship and the national outdoor championship, the latter with a throw of 69 feet, 8 inches, a personal best. With minimal training in the discus, he even finished second in the state as a senior. He seemed unbeatable, until his high school career ended on a sour note when he lost by an inch in the shot put at the national outdoor championships. As devastating as the loss was at the time, he looks back now and believes it helped him in the long run.

"After my junior year, the success went to my head," admits DiGiorgio. "I had newspapers and broadcasters con-

stantly calling; people started treating me like I was a star." Featured in *The New York Times* and as *Sports Illustrated's* Old Spice Athlete of the Month, his popularity among his peers soared when *Rolling Stone* magazine coated him in black body paint, closed down the park where he trained, and brought in a crane as a backdrop for a photo shoot. DiGiorgio's menacing full-page photograph ran in the magazine's 1998 Sports Hall of Fame feature, which also included such stars as Keith Van Horn and Terrell Davis.

Casting him as a phenomenon, the media honed in on his unorthodox training techniques. Taking his cues from reruns of television's *World's Strongest Man*, he pushed the family's 1993 Buick LeSabre while Dominick applied increasing pressure on the brakes. He pulled a sled loaded with 350 pounds of weights, and ran up a hill wearing a 50-pound weighted vest and carrying two 40-pound dumbbells.

In 1996, Tony Naclerio, throws coach for the Scarlet Knights track team, heard about the kid who was on his way to shattering every indoor and outdoor high school shot-put record in New Jersey. Naclerio went to one of DiGiorgio's meets and learned that an old friend, a Jesuit priest, had once coached Kevin's father. The connection served as an icebreaker.

"Kevin was coached by his dad, which is very unusual," says Naclerio. "He's also overcome a lot of physical limitations, since outstanding throwers tend to be tall with long limbs. Shot-putters mature like a fine wine. Kevin probably won't reach his peak until he's 26 or 27 years old and should be able to compete well into his 30s." ➔

Fairway Reunion

A Rutgers degree is just the first thing these golf pros have in common.

Two of Rutgers' best women's golfers of the last decade—Cheryl Simmeth-Anderson (DC'91) and Cheri Rice (RC'97)—had never met until they competed against one another last year in the LPGA's Northeast Section Championship in Queen's Town Harbour in Maryland. "People who knew us both always told me that we looked alike," says Simmeth-Anderson. "When I saw Cheri on the course in a Rutgers sweatshirt, I instantly knew it was her. Now we're good friends."

Besides competing in some of the same tournaments, each of the women teaches professionally: Simmeth-Anderson at the Metropolitan Country Club in White Plains, New York, and Rice at Great Bay Golf Club in Somers Point. There are other coincidences: both spent last winter's golf season in

Orlando, Florida; took lessons from the same instructor; and were two of the five teaching professionals who offered training tips in a recent article in *Golf for Women* magazine.

Simmeth-Anderson, who was last year's runner-up in the Women's Metropolitan Match Play Championships, plans to go to qualifying school this summer to get her LPGA tour card. A holder of seven Rutgers golf team records, Rice's highlight in competition so far was making the cut last year in an LPGA Futures Tournament, a mini-tour event for professionals in Syracuse, New York.



SIMMETH-ANDERSON (TOP) FINISHED FIFTH AND RICE SECOND IN LAST YEAR'S LPGA QUEEN'S TOWN HARBOUR TOURNAMENT.

With scholarship offers from schools throughout the country, DiGiorgio felt his best chance to improve was under Naclerio, the U.S. Olympic Team throws coach in Atlanta in 1996. And while he's made steady progress in both the shot put and the discus, he is still adjusting to competing against bigger and stronger athletes. "In high school, the shot put weighed 12 pounds, and everyone was chasing me," he says. "The shot put on this level weighs 16 pounds and now I'm chasing mostly older guys who are more physically mature than me. But I've never been part of a team like this; I love the camaraderie, and it gives me added incentive to do well."

Michael Mulqueen, head coach of the track team, credits the success of the throw events—shot put, discus, javelin, and hammer—with helping Rutgers finish first this season in the Metropolitan Conference and fifth in



the Big East Conference. DiGiorgio made it to the final round in every meet, racking up points for his team's overall score. "Considering that a freshman has to adjust to an entirely new lifestyle, travel, and level of competition, Kevin had an unbelievable year," he says.

In his track clothes at practice, DiGiorgio doesn't resemble an average guy anymore: his quadriceps are like tree trunks. He puts his sunglasses on the ground and moves into the shot-put pit to demonstrate the glide versus the spin technique and the importance of a 45-degree-angle release point. He then stretches, runs a series of 40-yard sprints, and throws the shot put and discus about 60 more times.

With the team's runners racing around the track, DiGiorgio and the other throwers seem like tortoises among hares. It's an apt metaphor: For these athletes, improvement comes an inch at a time over several years. DiGiorgio has come to realize that patience is more than a virtue—it's what fuels the future: "I don't even dream about the Olympics; you need to throw at least 69 or 70 feet to qualify. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I've learned to take it one day at a time." □