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Kelci Bryant: From Harrison to London

State champion diver takes second shot at Olympic medal

By Sam King
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Kelci Bryant spent her childhood moving from place to place for the betterment of her diving career.

She looks back at her short stay as a West Lafayette resident as a period where she felt like a “normal teenager” even though she still very much lived an abnormal teenage lifestyle outside of the high school halls.

Bryant spent a semester of her freshman year at West Lafayette High School and attended Harrison her sophomore year, where she won a state diving championship in her only season of high school competition.

“I got to win a state championship there, which was awesome,” said Bryant, who will be competing in the 3-meter synchronized diving event for Team USA at the London Olympics. “I have a lot of good memories of Lafayette. I’m definitely happy I made the move there.”

Now Bryant, who moved to Indianapolis after her year at Harrison and was homeschooled, is chasing a different championship, one that appears to be within reach, according to her diving coach, Wenbo Chen.

“This time, I think she’s ready to win a medal, not just go to the Games,” Chen told Tyler, Texas, NBC affiliate KETK.

Her first Olympics appearance nearly resulted in a place on the podium. Bryant and partner Ariel Rittenhouse were tied for third going into the final dive. The duo finished fourth, one place short of a bronze medal.

“I just remember looking up at that scoreboard seeing after we were tied for third that we



Kelci Bryant dives during the 3-meter springboard semifinals during the USA Diving Grand Prix in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

were no longer in the top three. We were fourth place. I didn’t believe it. I said, ‘No, that’s not right,’” Bryant recalls.

“I didn’t go there just planning to go, I was planning to medal. It was hard. The past four years, that’s been my motivator.”

This time around, Bryant is teaming with Abby Johnston in the 3-meter synchronized springboard in what will likely be Bryant’s last Olympic Games.

She started competing with the national team in 2005.

Bryant said “never say never,” but her plan is to give up diving and return to the Uni-

versity of Minnesota, where she won two NCAA titles, and complete her degree requirements.

Bryant’s short stay in the area was memorable. She said while other classmates from her time in West Lafayette will return and see each other at reunions, the national team requirements offer a different type of reunion.

“They go to high school and then go off to college and they get together every once in awhile when they are back in their hometown,” Bryant said. “We get to get together when we are overseas and catch up and bond.”

KELCI BRYANT

Meet Kelci Bryant, 23, a native of Chatham, Ill., whose travels led her to a stop in West Lafayette to be trained by former Purdue diving coach Wenbo Chen.

Bryant attended West Lafayette High School for one semester before going to Harrison her sophomore year. In her one year at Harrison, she broke the IHSA state finals diving record in 2005 (later broken by Elwood’s Mary Beth Dunnichay in 2011) with a score of 504.10.

Here’s what else the two-time Olympian has accomplished:

- » Nine-time national champion.
- » Fourth place in the 3-meter springboard synchronized diving event with Ariel Rittenhouse in the 2008 Olympic Games.
- » Gold medalist in synchronized 3-meter at 2006 FINA Grand Prix.
- » Silver medalist in synchronized 3-meter at 2007 Pan American Games.
- » Silver medalist in synchronized 3-meter at 2012 Fina World Diving Series.
- » Big Ten Conference 1-meter and 3-meter champion in 2010 and 2011 with the University of Minnesota.
- » 2010 NCAA champion in 3-meter diving at Purdue’s Boilermaker Aquatic Center.
- » 2011 NCAA champion in 1-meter diving.

Patterson realized Olympic potential while at Purdue

By Sam King
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Kara Patterson put everything into her first throw at the Olympic javelin trials earlier this month.

It was a good thing she did.

The former Purdue track and field star’s javelin flew 196 feet, 2 inches. Three throws later, she would hyperextend her knee and pass on her final two attempts. Her distance was surpassed once, on Brittany Borman’s final attempt.

Patterson’s first throw held up to earn a second trip to the Olympic Games in the event.

“I was a little forward with my upper body. In javelin, you have to be back behind your block leg to throw real far,” Patterson said. “Being forward on top of that block leg pushed my knee down and back rather than letting it stay strong and move up and forward. I hyperextended it pretty bad, but I have the best possible medical team I can think of working with me and getting me strong for London.”

“I am really positive about it.”

So is Team USA javelin coach Ty Sevin.

“Whether she is 100 percent or 90 percent doesn’t really make a difference,” Sevin said. “It’s just all about her process and hoping she goes through the steps she needs to take to be ready at the Games.”



Kara Patterson celebrates making the Olympic team. BY MATT SLOCUM/AP

“Very rarely does anyone go into the Games at 100 percent.”

Unlike her 2008 trip to Beijing, Patterson is not satisfied this time simply as an Olympic participant.

Anything less than the top eight means she did not perform at her best, she said.

“In 2008, that was the year of my redshirt junior year at Purdue, so I still had my fifth year when I came back from Beij-

ing,” Patterson said. “That was just the best possible experience ever. I was wide-eyed and amazed at this whole Olympic experience. Then to come home after it was over and have a support system already in place at Purdue and be able to lean on teammates and coaches and the athletic department, was great.”

“To go back and have them waiting for me was awesome. To still have another season wear-



ing a Boilermaker uniform was a really cool experience. This time I’ve been professional for three years. I signed with Asics after the 2009 collegiate season. I’ve traveled and competed with the very best in the world and see those girls (other Olympians) at competitions.”

Patterson, a Vancouver, Wash., native, got her start in javelin as a high school freshman. After one junior varsity meet where she out-threw varsity participants, she began her trek to where she is today.

At Purdue, she realized reaching the Olympics was possible.

“As soon as there was some clue that I could go to the Olympics, I never stopped,” Patterson said. “My sophomore year at Purdue, it was spring 2006, and I had a personal best at one of our home meets in really early April. It was like 30 degrees and snow and freezing cold, just terrible conditions.”

“I threw a 56.19 (meters) I believe, which is still the Rankin Stadium record. I was like, ‘Wow, I never thought I would throw that far.’ It came so easily. I thought, ‘If I do this on purpose, maybe I can throw even farther.’ From there, I kept working with (former Purdue assistant) coach (Rodney) Zuyderwyk and having fun with it.”

KARA PATTERSON

Kara Patterson, 26, a native of Vancouver, Wash., and former Boilermaker standout in the javelin who has taken advantage of social media with Twitter, a blog and Facebook page to reach out to fans.

Patterson graduated from Purdue in 2009 with a degree in nutrition, fitness and health. She’s sponsored by Asics and has been a professional for three seasons. Now living in Chula Vista, Calif., Patterson has excelled since her Olympic debut in 2008.

“I think the biggest thing she’s improved on is her consistency,” U.S. javelin coach Ty Sevin said. “Out of the top 10 throws she’s had, maybe only one or two performances out of her top 10 happened before 2008.”

Here’s what Patterson has been able to accomplish in the event:

- » American record holder with throw of 218 feet, 6 inches.
- » Four-time national champion (2008-11).
- » 2005, 2008 and 2009 Big Ten champion.
- » 2008 U.S. Olympics trials champion with then trials record throw of 191-9.
- » Four-time NCAA Midwest Regional champion (2005-06, 2008-09).
- » 2009 NCAA outdoor runner-up.
- » Set an American collegiate record with a throw of 202 feet at the 2008 Big Ten meet.
- » 2008 and 2009 Big Ten field athlete of the year.