

WORLD CLASS

By Glenn Thompson

Stanford Graduate Jillian Camarena has known steady and consistent success over her shot put career. At every level she's always been on the national stage, often on or atop the podium when her event concluded.

Camarena was introduced to the sport in the seventh grade. Her older brother, the Woodland High School record-holder in the event, handed Jillian her first shot put when the two went out for a day at the local ring.

Camarena was a two-year All-American at Woodland High School in Woodland, CA. She was the 1999 California state champion in shot put and runner-up in discus and the 2000 state champion in discus. She was named by the Sacramento Bee as their Track and Field Woman Performer of the Year.

Matriculation to Stanford was almost a given. She had long dreamed of doing her undergraduate work in Palo Alto. Perhaps that was because her father is a graduate.

While at Stanford, Camarena continued her winning ways and built an impressive resume. In 2001 she won the gold medal at the Junior Pan American Championships with a throw of 52-2 (15.90m) and placed ninth at the U.S. Outdoor Championships. In 2002 she was the 2002 Pac-10 champion with a throw of 54-10¼ (16.72m) and third at the NCAA Championships with a season-best of 55-1¼ (16.80m). In 2003 she finished third in the shot at the NCAA Championships with a career best and school record throw of 57-4¾ (17.49m) and broke the long-standing school record of 57-1 (17.40m) set by Carol Cady in 1984. She finished seventh in the shot put at the U.S. Outdoor Championships with a throw of 56-6½ (17.23m). Camarena finished second at the NCAA Indoor Championships with an indoor school record throw of 57-2¾ (17.44m). Her senior campaign in 2004 garnered a bronze at the U.S. Olympic Trials (17.73m/58-2), NCAA Outdoor Championships silver (18.11m/59-5), a Pac-10 championship (17.63m/57-10.25), 2nd at NCAA Indoors (17.27m/56-8), and ranked #3 in the U.S. by *Track & Field News* with a best of 18.15m/59-6.75.

Last season, in her first as a post-collegiate, she was 4th at USA Outdoor Champs (17.72m/58-1.75) and was the USA Indoor champion (17.31m/56-9.5), and ranked #4 in the U.S. by *Track & Field News*, with a best of 17.94m/58-10.25.

The 5-10, 250 pound Camarena had firmly established herself on U.S. soil, but had yet to give the Europeans much of a reason for concern.

All that changed on February 25 of this year in the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston. Camarena, a lifetime glider, showed off her freshly minted rotational technique,

cracking 60' (60-1) on her opener, then shocking the putting world with a resounding 63 feet, 2¼ on her second effort for the win at the AT&T USATF Indoor Championships, and a ticket to Moscow for the IAAF World Indoor Championships.

The 24 year old, now residing in Provo, Utah, took some time out to talk with *LSTJ* between Boston and Moscow, where she entered the competition seeded only behind Nadzeya Ostapchuk of Belarus (66-7) and Natallia Khorenko of Belarus (64-1½) who have put the shot farther than Camarena this indoor season.

Long & Strong: *Did you play any other sports in high school?*

Jillian Camarena: I played many sports in high school. I played volleyball, basketball and city league softball since track and school softball were at the same time. I also did club volleyball and basketball in the summers.

LSTJ: *What's college life like at a renowned academic institution like Stanford while competing at the highest levels of the NCAA? Did you ever feel like you had to make sacrifices one way or the other? Or that maybe you could have given more to your athletics elsewhere?*

JC: I really enjoyed my time at Stanford. I had amazing teachers and met some of the most intelligent and talented people on earth, and many of them were freshmen with me. I think being at such an academic institution actually helped me in my studies, because I knew I had to work hard, or I would not stay eligible, and thus not be able to compete. I definitely pulled more all-nighters than I would like to admit, and slept through my fair share of classes, but I think being at a high level of athletics and academics was the best way for me to go through college. I could not slack in either, and when I was running low, Coach Robert Weir always could tell and gave me the necessary rest that was always just enough to get everything done I needed to. I do not think I could have been a pre-medical student at Stanford and compete, but I loved my history degree, and know I gave everything I could in both while I was there.



Camarena was all smiles in Boston.

Victor Sailer

LSTJ: How tough was it for you to finish third at the 2004 Olympic Trials, but miss the 'A' standard and a trip to Olympia?

JC: I think missing the Olympics was probably one of the most disappointing challenges I've had to face in my career. Coming so close, and watching it on TV in such a special place, made me realize that I never wanted to miss like that again. I never wanted to chase a mark again. Every competition after that I tried too hard, when I needed to be completely relaxed. I think that is why the season after the Olympics was so difficult. I was frustrated that I had peaked in my career and stopped enjoying the sport. I knew if I was going to continue on I needed to make some changes and that is what led to coming to Utah and training with Craig Carter.

LSTJ: Talk about your decision to move to Provo to train.

JC: I decided to move to Utah after much thought and consideration. I had worked with an amazing college coach [Weir], but after five years in the Bay Area, I needed to get away from the traffic, as well as get back into school and get my Masters. I had always wanted to be a teacher, so I thought I would move back home to Woodland, CA, and get my teaching credential from Sacramento State.

All this changed when I heard from Coach Poole and Coach Legas at Brigham Young University, who wanted me to become their team's strength coach after theirs had decided to leave. I applied for the job and was turned down because I did not have the background necessary. During that time I contacted Coach Craig Carter, who recruited me when he was at Utah State, and was now in Provo running the Utah Valley Speed and Acceleration Center. I went to talk to him about possibly coaching me and we had a four-hour conversation covering all my concerns and all his coaching theories, including his desire to make me a spinner. While I was fishing in California with my father, I received a call from Coach Poole on a Wednesday telling me the news that he was able to get me into the Exercise Science and Pedagogy program at BYU, if I could come and be their strength coach. We left our vacation and I was in Utah three days later, in school, and coaching the BYU track team.

LSTJ: Why did you make the move from the glide to the rotational technique?

JC: After 12 years of gliding, I never thought I would become a spinner. I was having doubts as to how long I was going to continue in the sport. I still loved track, but I was not sure if my abilities would match up to my dreams. After my discussion with Craig this past summer, we decided to try the spin. We figured this would be a good year to commit to the spin since there were not too many major international competitions, but he told me it was a full commitment: no going back and forth between the glide and spin. I looked at all the international competitors and realized being only 5'10", that the top throwers in the world had a physical advantage over me, with many of them over 6' tall. Craig had seen me do the South African drills around 60' during my college career and knew I could spin. He knew that the spin would give me the extra advantage and help me reach the same level as the world-class throwers. That was if I could get the spin down, of course. I never thought it would come along this quickly.

LSTJ: Talk about your technical approach to the (1) glide and (2) rotation. Do you emulate anyone as a rotational thrower? What do you do well, and what do you need to improve?

JC: As a glider I really focused on getting as much torque out of my body as possible. Staying back and getting my hips ahead of my shoulders was my main focus. Speed was also a key for me in the glide. Keeping my shoulder back as long as possible, and finishing out over the board with a high speed of release were some of my keys in the glide.

Craig's philosophy in approaching the spin has become my own. He has tried to instill in my mind that the whole throw comes from the back of the ring, and if I set the throw up out of the back, that the rest would take care of itself. The power and the speed come from a scoop in the back and a linear drive to the middle. I think watching the film of John Godina has been extremely helpful.

I have watched many of his throws and really enjoy the rhythm, power, and beauty of his throwing. His form is what I really try to model my throwing after. As a spinner, my strongest attribute is being able to finish the throw and reach over the toeboard. That is one thing that has carried over from my gliding days.

As for improvement? I need to improve everything! Nothing about my throw is perfect at all, as every thrower knows, but mostly I just need to be more comfortable with the spin. I have the general movement down, but I need to become consistent out of the back, learn to stay back in my



Victor Sailer
Camarena has found new life with the rotational technique.

power position, and become quicker in the ring. I need to tighten up what I have been able to learn the past five months and also learn how to be able attack the throw more. It is still so new to me that I continually have to be reminded of the basics.

LSTJ: *Mentally, do you approach the rotation differently than you did the glide?*

JC: The biggest difference, mentally, for me, is realizing that I cannot muscle the spin. I have to be completely relaxed in the spin, because if I am not, then my form breaks down so bad that my distance drops significantly. You need to be relaxed in the glide as well, and that is when the big throws come, but I feel like you can get away with being a little more tense.

LSTJ: *What kind of changes did you make in your training routine?*

JC: My training routine is not completely different. During college I spent a lot of time in the weight room. When throwing would get frustrating I would go lift. I still lift, but my focus is now on throwing more while improving my strength levels. I also knew as a spinner I would need to be lighter and quicker so I have tried to alter my nutrition. The biggest thing is that my time is more limited being back in school and coaching as well. Now I am more disciplined with my training and make sure I get it done even if I am there late.

LSTJ: *Suddenly we're having an explosion of 60' women putters (Laura Gerraughty, Kristin Heaston, Liz Wanless, Adriane Blewitt and Camarena) in the U.S. We're on the verge of being competitive with the Europeans. To what do you attribute this?*

JC: I think that we have some amazing coaches and athletes in the United States. I have seen some of the most athletic female shot putters who continue in the track and field, instead of playing another sport. The community of throwers also helps build up female shot putters. I know if it were not for the support system I have, I would have been finished with throwing as soon as I graduated college. Although female shot putting is not the most watched event at most track meets, the desire of the athletes has increased the number of throwers overall. I am looking forward to improved financial support for female shot putters, and making the event as exciting as the men's shot is now. I am so excited this year to go to meets

and have more female throwers than male throwers. That may be due in part to Title IX, but it is still exciting. The coaches we have in the United States are also very important to the success of female throwers. I would not be throwing over 60' had I it not been for my high school coach Rob Rathbun, Coach Weir, and Coach Craig Carter.

LSTJ: *Recount Boston for us. To have such a huge PR must have been overwhelming.*

JC: I am still overwhelmed with the flurry that Boston has created. The day actually started out slightly stressful. I have learned not to become attached to a particular shot, but it is still hard not to, especially with indoor shots, because they all have such a different feel to them. When I went to check in my shot, they found a small dent that could have been deemed a "finger grip" and could be an advantage so they impounded my shot. That is never a good thought, but I checked out the other shots and found one that I was comfortable with.

After that, I spent most of my time in the warm-up area relaxing, listening to some music and trying not to get nervous. I am not a nervous thrower but just sitting around can make someone a little apprehensive about whatever the situation is. The goal was to keep my own schedule and not have the rest of the competition dictate how I competed. Once I got out on the track and started warming up, I was comfortable and ready to go.

When I warm up, my standing throws are usually around 48-50 feet, but my first one of the day was around 52'. I knew it was going to be a good day. My warm-up throws were all over, or just under, the 60-foot line, and I knew I was ready to get a PR, I was not expecting what I threw. The goal of my first throw was to get an easy mark and make it to finals, but still put the pressure on the others. It was 60' 1", and everyone was screaming, but I knew the other girls could throw that. After that I knew I just had to go after it and leave everything I had in that ring. My second throw was the big one (63' 2¼") and I became overwhelmed with emotion. I have never been so excited. I laughed, I cried: every single emotion a person can have, I had in those next minutes before I threw. It was then I knew I could compete with the world.

LSTJ: *After Boston, it was off to Moscow for the IAAF World Indoor Championships just two weeks later.*

JC: Worlds was not exactly what I thought it was going to be like, but I really learned a lot from the experience. When I

THROWING PROGRESSION		
<u>YEAR</u>	<u>SHOT</u>	<u>DISCUS</u>
2006	19.26m/63-2¼"	
2005	18.15m/59-6.75	
2004 (SR)	18.15m/59-6.75	
2003 (JR)	17.49m/57-4.75	52.52m/172-4
2002 (SO)	16.94m/55-7	
2001 (FR)	16.38m/53-9	
2000 (SR)	15.22m/49-11½	49.09m/161-0
1999 (JR)	15.53m/50-11¼	48.30m/158-5

first got there, I didn't feel too bad. I thought I was used to the time change in the first day. The second day I got the flu, so much for being used to the time change. I was stuck in bed for that day and the next. Dr. Fredrickson, the team doctor, who happened to be from Stanford, really took care of me that first night and made sure I was hydrated and had the proper medication. By the fourth day, I felt a ton better, so I tried to practice and my balance was pretty bad, and I had some stomach issues still, but overall it wasn't a horrible practice.

My biggest problem was that I could not feel my positions. I really tried to stay calm during the trials and warmed up around 18m. Then my first throw happened. Then my second throw slipped because they were using brand new outdoor shots, not the indoor ones I was used to. It really surprised me they used them, but I just had to deal with it. I knew I had to calm down for

my last throw and just remember all the practice I had had, and I hit the automatic qualifying mark on my third throw (18.25m/59'10½"). I was surprised, but so thankful I got to move on! Finals were full of the same type of throwing; unbalanced and all over the place, something I hadn't experienced before. I could not understand why my body felt good, but my mind and my body were definitely not working together (17.60m/57'9")!

All in all, I really enjoyed my time in Russia and really look forward to meeting those girls again. One of the biggest things about the competition was that I found myself in awe of the girls I was competing against, instead of thinking I could compete with them. Many of them could do a standing throw at 19 meters. My standing throws have never been really good, so it was impressive to see all them doing it. I just didn't realize that they only gained a meter or so with their full glide; and I gain a lot more out of my spin. It was great, and now I just need to compete with them because I know I can. I am done being impressed; now I have to compete.

LSTJ: *How has your transition been to post-collegiate throwing? How do you balance your training?*

Training has been difficult in many ways, but my first three months were the worst. I was working an 8-5 job and would get out of work and go practice. It was during the winter, so it was dark and many times the lights to the stadium would not be on, so I would throw in the dark. The shots were cold and then it would be time to lift.

I remember one night I had to meet Robert in the weight room at 10pm and I think we left around 12am. He was so dedicated, and I am so thankful for him. I am lucky now to be involved with the BYU track team and have access to all the amenities a college athlete is thankful to have. It is a wonderful training environment with wonderful coaches who support my career. Craig is amazing and is able to be there at the same time every day and I can schedule my classes around it. I think right now the hardest part is

being back in school. I am so thankful for the opportunity to be getting my Masters, but missing a week of school is very difficult. I have amazing and understanding professors as well.

LSTJ: *Can you give us some lifting numbers in the major lifts?*

JC:
Cleans: 285 lbs., Squats: 500 lbs., Snatch: 200 lbs., Bench:

250 lbs.

LSTJ: *Tell me three things throws fans would not know about you?*

JC: (A) I love to fish! I go fishing with my dad every summer and have gone since I was a baby. My next goal is to learn how to fly fish! Anyone want to teach me?

(B) I love to play the piano and am learning to play the guitar.

(C) I love to sew. I don't know why I think its funny that I do, but I guess you just don't think of many shot putters sitting down and sewing a bag or something!

LSTJ: *What do you see in your future athletically and professionally?*

JC: Athletically, I hope to enjoy a career where I am able to fulfill my goals, such as make all the next World Championship and Olympic teams up through 2008. I am unsure at this point if I will go past 2008, but as long as I still love what I am doing, then I probably will. Professionally, I would really like to pursue the career I am currently in. I love being a strength coach. I love working with athletes and would love to extend that passion over to being a track coach. First I think I will focus on my own career before I take up those pursuits, but I hope to continue to work in the track world when I am all finished competing. ***LSTJ***



The second round bomb brought Camarena to her knees.