

SPORTS

"Quote/unquote"

'You could say I was born to jump.'

— High jumper Sean Cate... see story below

Cate 'Hops' to it

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

A competitive high jumper for just the past six months, local resident Sean Cate is now regarded as one of the top prospects on the Canadian track & field scene following a rather dramatic entrance at an indoor meet in February.

The 19-year-old former basketball star has literally improved by leaps and bounds in a sport he rediscovered after leaving quite an impression on the coaching staff of the Speed River Track & Field Club in Guelph.

Frustrated by where his promising hoops career had taken him after a year at a North Carolina high school called Christian Faith Center Academy, the 6-foot-5 small forward enrolled in the University of Guelph's political science program last fall and was an athlete "drifting around without a sport" until his father made a suggestion.

"You're a good jumper and you did some high-jumping before. Why don't you try track," said dad Adam, a native Iranian who played on a basketball scholarship at the University of South Alabama.

"You might as well give it a shot."

Born and raised in Georgetown, Sean's mother Meg described him as an energetic toddler whose athletic exuberance sometimes overpowered his co-ordination, leading to many bruises and stitches, but happily, no serious injuries.

"I was always jumping around as a kid. Those Jolly Jumpers that you put in a doorway? I lived on that," he laughed.

"You could say that I was born to jump, and track seems to personify everything I enjoy doing. I just never associated it with something I'd do long term. I was good at it in Grades 7 and 8, got away from it and now I've found it again. It's a different environment than basketball for sure."

Cate walked into the fieldhouse at Guelph Jan. 31 and asked a couple of the Speed River coaches if they would work with him. A personal best of 5.5 metres in the long jump was decent, but nowhere close to the

7.5m mark that some of the club members were registering.

Cate's 1.80m in the high jump, however, piqued their interest. With just a few practices to begin building his technical form, he successfully leaped 1.85m at his first indoor meet in Windsor.

Then a week later, at the ironically named Last Chance Meet in Guelph, where athletes have a final opportunity to qualify for provincial and national championships, Cate caused a stir by clearing 2.06m to win the competition against some experienced university competitors, putting him into the top 10 in the country.

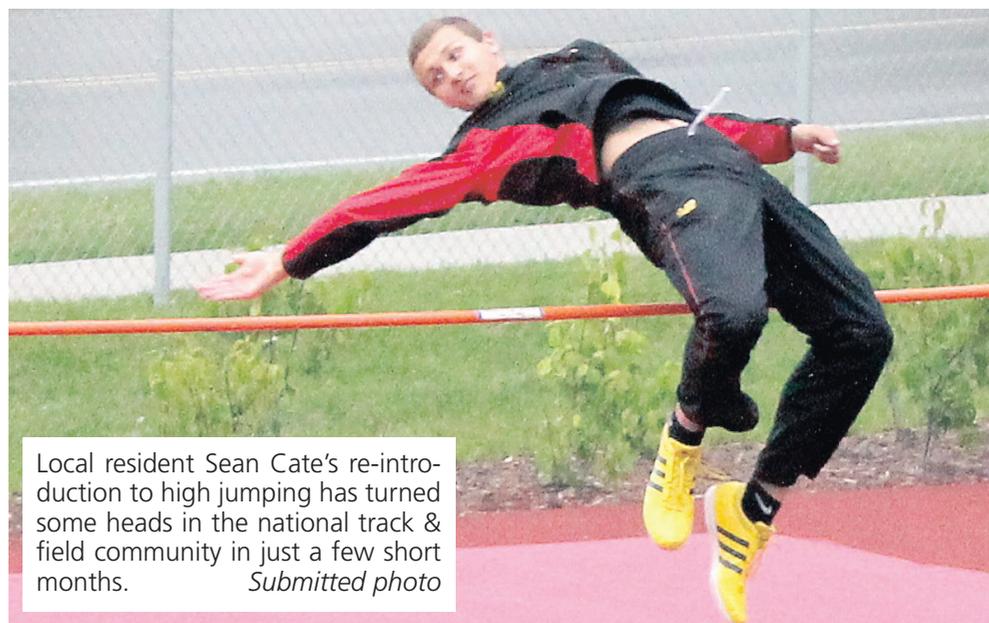
"To make 2.06 in basketball shoes was amazing and I'm glad I got it on my iPad. He turned everyone's heads at the university because of the limited amount of technical background he had," said his coach at Speed River, Garth Peet.

"We call him Hops. He has that natural gift of spring in his steps and if you watch him, he actually walks on his toes. Sean's a huge talent and definitely a name to look out for with the potential to be one of the best in the country. Being a crossover from basketball, you can see that he approaches the high jump similar to how he'd dunk the ball. High jump is like anything else, but there's a large technical process behind it and Sean is picking it up really well in practice. He could clear 2.15 tomorrow."

Since the revelation at the Last Chance meet, Cate hasn't been able to match that height in competition, although he's still listed as the number one-ranked jumper among 19-year-olds in Canada. He placed eighth at the senior nationals in Moncton in June, which was won by 2012 Olympic bronze medalist Derek Drouin, and just missed earning a berth at the Canada Games in Quebec, placing second at the qualifier in Windsor.

Cate was deemed ineligible to earn international points for the University of Guelph's varsity team this past year, although he did train with the group, but will be able to compete for the Gryphons as a sophomore.

In his last big meet of the summer, Cate



Local resident Sean Cate's re-introduction to high jumping has turned some heads in the national track & field community in just a few short months. Submitted photo

finished in a tie for fifth at the Canadian Junior Track & Field Championships in St. Therese, Que. last month. Having improved his personal best by .26 of a metre in less than half a year, he needs to reach 2.06m at a meet before the end of the summer to qualify for Quest for Gold funding from Athletics Canada, but has set his goals much higher.

"The cutoff for the Olympic standard is 2.25 to 2.30 and I expect to be jumping 2.20 to 2.25 by the end of this year," said the confident Cate, who graduated from Toronto District Christian High School in Woodbridge last year.

"Timing is everything and from what I've learned so far, being consistent is the key. Two Canadians jump more than 2.30 and they're at least 22 years old. For 2016 in Rio, I'll be about Derek (Drouin)'s age

when he was in London last year. The Olympic cycle looks good for me and I should be approaching my peak for sure."

Cate is enrolled at Guelph for the coming year, but there has been some interest from NCAA schools in the U.S. about possible scholarship offers for 2014-15. The family's garage has been transformed into a gym and although the closest high-jumping facility is at Speed River, Peet says Cate never misses a practice and usually shows up well before his teammates.

"We've already had some schools from the U.S. call and say, 'Hey, we've seen you jump. We're willing to work with you, but one more year at Guelph will help you develop and refine the talent you have with a well-respected program that's won (CIS) nationals three of the last five years. I have no doubt that'll help me improve," Cate added.

Samuel wins Tour

Peterborough's Travis Samuel edged out three other riders at the finish line to win the feature 108-km elite road race at the ninth-annual Tour de Terra Cotta held Monday afternoon.

Five hundred and twenty six riders registered for one of the six races on the schedule, which included an Ontario Cycling Association series youth time trial.

Toronto's Jamie Gilgen took top spot in the women's elite road event in another



Monday's Tour de Terra Cotta drew 526 riders.

Photo by John Bachmann
tight finish, beating Jennifer Stephenson at the line by three seconds.

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