

Crothers' medal from '64 Games inspired Olympic coach

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When Richard Parkinson was a Grade 6 student at Baythorn Public School in Thornhill, he recalled Canadian Olympian Bill Crothers speaking about competing in the 1964 Games in Tokyo and displaying the silver medal he won in the 800 metres.

At the same time, Parkinson recalled he had the opportunity to grasp the medal Crothers won.

That got him hooked on track and field.

Parkinson competed in the sport through his days at Thornlea Secondary School along with the Scarborough Optimists and at Texas Tech University, where he threw the shot put, javelin, discus and hammer while on a scholarship before graduating in 1989. He still competes occasionally in masters events where he holds Canadian masters marks.

But he was never able to represent Canada in an Olympics.

But when the 2016 Summer Games take place in Rio de Janeiro next month, the now 52-year-old

Stouffville resident will be part of Canada's track and field contingent as a coach for five athletes in the throwing events.

"I never got (to the Olympics) as an athlete and was never close. I'm fulfilling a childhood dream. It's a huge honour and a privilege to help athletes from across Canada to fulfill their dreams," he said while working with Canada's champion female shot put thrower Brittany Crew at the outdoor shot put station at Stouffville District Secondary School Thursday.

"It's a nice recognition with what work I've done with Athletics Canada. I'm excited and thrilled."

In joining the national team coaching staff, Parkinson has paid his dues.

That began in earnest when he launched his coaching career in 1997, while residing in Kitchener-Waterloo, with the Laurel Creek Track Club.

After being with the club for just over two years, an employment opportunity arose that forced him to move to Toronto where he worked with Wrigley Canada in their marketing department.

But it did not stop him from coaching. He began a track club in 1999-2000 called Sisu that he continued with until 2007.

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During that year, Parkinson got wind York University was searching for an assistant coach to work with their track and field team.

Parkinson contacted York head coach Colin Inglis and after an interview was subsequently hired where he began as a volunteer coach with their throwers.

Since taking on that position, which he still holds, Parkinson helped build the Toronto school's throwing program from almost nothing to being one of the strongest in Canada.

At this year's Canadian Inter-

university Sport championships, Parkinson-coached throwers claimed six of 12 titles.

Besides coaching at the university level, Parkinson has worked with the national team program for the past eight years.

That included coaching Canada's throwers at the 2015 Pan American Games in Toronto and 2015 world championships in Beijing.

At this year's Canadian Championships and Rio Selection competition in Edmonton, Parkinson played an instrumental role in helping Crew, who he also coaches at York, obtain a personal best throw in the shot put at 18.06 metres.

Working with Parkinson since December, 2013, Crew was quick to praise his assistance.

"It's been great. I've improved by almost one metre each year since I've worked with Richard. We make a great team," she said.

"His technical aspects of throwing is great. I've never had a coach go that much and beyond. I attribute a lot of my success to him."

While sporting an impres-

sive coaching resume, Parkinson recalled it was not until late May when he received a text message from Peter Eriksson, Athletics Canada head coach, suggesting he should have his personal calendar open on July 29.

Citing he was going to Rio de Janeiro to be Crew's personal coach at the Olympics regardless, Parkinson knew July 29 was the first day the Canadian track team would assemble for their first camp upon arriving in Brazil.

Eriksson eventually followed up his text with a phone call to Parkinson later that same day to inform him he would officially be a part of Canada's coaching staff in Rio.

Parkinson did not want to go out on a limb to predict how his five-member Canadian throwers would fare.

But he feels the Canadian track team as a whole should reach the medal podium on a few occasions.

"I've set up some expectations, but I don't want the athletes to get delusional. It's about managing expectations," he said.

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