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Industry Watch

Paralegal Aims to Long-Jump Into Olympics

By Noah Barron
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WALNUT — As long-jumper Tameisha King warmed up for a punishing training session at Mt. San Antonio College's track, she playfully slapped the calf of fellow teammate Tony Allmand.

"Whoa," Allmand said. "What was that? Tameisha, where do you work again?"

King said nothing, but grinned from beneath her visor.

"Wait, no, don't ignore me now," he said. "Where is it that you work?"

"A law firm," she responded curtly.

"Oh, that's right — I need to call them so they can represent me — I'm suing you for harassment!"

Both athletes began to laugh as they hit the track at top speed. Their team, the Southern California Cheetahs, is aptly named — each member moves like a blisteringly fast predator.

King, who is a paralegal at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton in Los Angeles, is training for the U.S. Olympic track team, with the goal of bringing home gold in the long jump in Beijing in 2008.

Her longest jump was 21 feet, 8¼ inches, which earned her second place in the nation, 39th in the world and a coveted Nike sponsorship.

But she is still short of Olympic gold. Women's first-place jumper Tatyana Lebedeva launched 23 feet, ½ inch at the 2004 Athens games.

King, 25, is nonchalant about juggling her Olympic training regimen and her responsibilities as a paralegal.

"Everything is tight, every hour is allotted for, but I don't mind sacrificing a little extra energy to work at Sheppard Mullin," she said.

She heads to the field around 8:30 each morning for her three-hour training session under famed track-and-field coach Ernie Gregoire.

As the athletes burn around the track, explode up the stadium stairs and blast their muscles in the weight room, Gregoire shouts encouragement and criticism.

Late in one such practice, the Cheetahs accidentally missed running up a row of stairs and Gregoire bellowed "No cheating!"

Gregoire, who has coached five other Olympians, including long-jump silver medalist Larry Myricks, considers King's dedication to her sport and her job impressive, but necessary.



ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

Tameisha King, a Sheppard Mullin paralegal said, "I view my track career as a sort of catapult. It allows me to travel around the world and do a lot. The law is my venue after track and field to accomplish my goals."

"After the training, Tameisha heads to the law firm and puts in a day of work," Gregoire said. "In order to get where they want to be, they have to do this — they're young adults with obligations to feed, clothe and house themselves. I think it makes the journey all the more special."

The journey certainly hasn't been easy so far. Though King was the top ranked junior competitor in the nation and attended the University of Notre Dame on an athletic scholarship, she suffered a big setback when she failed to qualify for the 2004 Olympic team. She got dehydrated and missed the qualifying jump distance by an inch and a half.

"Not making the team was a great motivator," she said. "I learned a lot, especially about nutrition and hydration, and I'm going to make it this time."

In the downtown Los Angeles high-rise offices of Sheppard Mullin, King is transformed. The tracksuit and running shoes are replaced by a fashionable blouse and three-inch heels.

"I love wearing high heels," she said, "but I can't wear them during the season, so I get the most of them while I can."

King's mentor and boss at Sheppard Mullin, litigation partner Joseph F. Coyne Jr., offered her a position after she e-mailed him through the Notre Dame alumni network.

King, who was born in Atlanta, had recently moved to Los Angeles.

"I get this e-mail from Tameisha asking for firm sponsors, donations, anything — and so I responded back 'How about a job?'" Coyne said.

Though she knew little about the law beforehand, King has excelled and plans to attend law school after the 2008 Olympics.

"The law isn't for everybody," Coyne said. "But we'd love to have Tameisha back here after law school. She was thrown into the thick of it without a lot of experience and she learned to swim — as well as jump."

"I view my track career as a sort of catapult," King said. "It allows me to travel around the world and do a lot. The law is my avenue after track and field to accomplish my goals. It's busy but it takes a lot to get me stressed. A lot of people might freak out, but track has prepared me. I do my best job under pressure."

King joined Sheppard Mullin in July in the litigation group and has worked on cases for clients such as Northrup Grumman. She's also the youngest paralegal on her team.

Fellow paralegal Robert Hertz said, "She fits in here — our group is the hardest working in the firm and she puts in all the hours and effort needed — she never lets us down."