



JUMP, SAM, JUMP!

Kendricks proves hard work pays off, brings home Olympic bronze

By Jared Redding
sports editor

In 2006, Sam Kendricks was looking for any event to simply get him on the Oxford Middle School track and field team roster. Not only did he make the middle school team, Sam went on to be the Gatorade Athlete of the Year for Mississippi high school boys' track and field. His high school personal best of 5.18 meters (17 feet) ranked in the top 10 nationally at the time.

After a decade of hard work, the road he traveled took him to the beautiful city of Rio De Janeiro where he took his experience and displayed it on the biggest stage in all of sports: The Olympic Games.

"People don't follow you for years, but they do when it comes to the Olympics because you have a USA on your chest," Kendricks said. "I'm a representative for them, for the country, and whoever is watching. You bear a really heavy burden when you go to the Olympic Games, but you have to bear it with a smile because you are a representative of your country."

In Kendricks' first appearance in the games, his hard work cashed in for bronze, earning a medal for his country, with a jump of 5.85 meters (19.2 feet). This was the first U.S. medal in the pole vault since Timothy Mack and Toby Stevenson in the Athens 2004 Olympic Games.

"He trains harder than just about anybody, and that is one thing that allows him to really be consistent," Sam's father and coach Scott Kendricks said.

In Oxford, Mississippi, the name

Sam Kendricks was recognized more and more once "Jump Sam Jump" posters, banners, and signs were put all over town prior to the event. The phrase became so popular, the commentators on the NBC stream of the event mentioned it before one of his jumps.

When the time came for Kendricks to jump in the finals, the people of the U.S. watched as their one hope for a pole vaulting medal competed.

Kendricks' pride and patriotism for his country was evident during the event qualifier. While he was running during an attempt, he heard the national anthem being played, and stopped mid attempt, put his pole down, and stood at attention, something he was instructed to do as a second lieutenant of the U.S. Army Reserve.

"It is just second nature to me as a soldier that when you hear the national anthem and you are not wearing a uniform and not wearing a hat, you stand in attention and salute the flag," Kendricks said. "If I didn't stop, then I would have been the villain."

Kendricks' long road to the Olympics was accompanied by his coach and father, Scott Kendricks.

Scott built a track and field powerhouse at Oxford High School, winning five state championships during his tenure there. Scott later resigned as head coach of the Chargers in order to oversee the pole vaulters at Ole Miss as a volunteer assistant. One of the vaulters under his wing was his son, Sam.

At Ole Miss, Sam earned second team All-American honors his freshman season and went on to win back to

back NCAA outdoor pole vault championships and first team All-American honors his sophomore and junior seasons. Sam pole vaulted in the professional ranks following his junior season, competing for Nike and the U.S. Army.

As a professional, Sam is the three time defending U.S. indoor national champion (2014-2016) and back to back U.S. outdoor national champion (2015 and 2016) in pole vault.

Sam set the U.S. Olympic trials record by jumping 5.91 meters (19.4 feet) before competing in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

"Him [Sam] having his father as a coach really helps him be confident," Sam's younger sister and current OHS junior Charli Kendricks said. Charli is continuing in her brother's footsteps and is a pole vaulter on the track and field team at OHS. She is the defending girls class 5A state champion in the pole vault.

"One of those things in life that you decide as a father is how much are you willing to do for one of your children. I just made the decision that it was going to be one of those sacrifices I was willing to make," Scott said.

"People sometimes understand parent-athlete relationships to have a lot of friction because the athlete is trying to grow and the parent is trying to exert control, but I think I have the ability to say it's for the greater good," Sam said. "He [his father] has my best interests at heart so I have to look out for him as much as he looks out for me."

According to Sam, the father-son team was a winning combination.

Photo courtesy of
Kirby Lee / USA TODAY Sports

Former OHS student Sam Kendricks hoists the American flag after winning his first Olympic medal.



OXFORD HIGH'S
FIRST OLYMPIC PARTICIPANT & MEDALIST



Olympic Men's Pole Vault Finals			
USA (KENDRICKS)	3	5.85 M	
FRANCE	2	5.98 M	
BRAZIL	1	6.03 M	