

By Hope McPherson
Brian Francis, Photography

SKY CHRISTOPHERSON

CYCLING

Sky is practical about his training, doubling his workouts with his commute.

The Competitive EDGE

Find yours at the WAC, training side by side
with Olympic-caliber athletes

WHEN IS A WORKOUT MORE THAN JUST A WORKOUT? When it's a career. The Washington Athletic Club makes it possible for all its members to stay active, work out and relax—or train really, *really* hard. “Elite athletes have a tradition and a history at the WAC,” says **Wayne Milner, Vice President Athletics**. “We have the facilities and the resources to help them train.”

In the 1930s, for example, longtime WAC athletic director **Ray Daughters** trained elite swimmer **Helene Madison** in the Club's 25-yard pool. Helene, dubbed Queen Helene by the press, eventually smashed 15 world records and claimed three gold medals at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. The WAC pool carries her name to this day, as does a pool near Northgate.

Fast-forward 70 years. Today at the WAC, elite athletes under age 30 can hold an “Athletic Membership.” Many represent the Club in a variety of sports venues. Their sports include (or have at some point) Olympic canoeing and cycling, professional basketball, adventure racing and more. “We have a total of 16 Athletic Members, and they all came before the Athletic Member Review Board with high recommendations in both skill level and character,” Wayne says. That board consists of himself, three members of the WAC Athletic Committee, one member of the WAC Membership & Marketing Committee and the Athletic Program Manager.

Read on and meet a few of the WAC's elite athletes. You never know who may be working out next to you!



CIRCULAR LOGIC

“Some cyclists will go their entire career without achieving a truly round, efficient pedal stroke. On the National Team, we used an exercise as a part of our warmup to start pedaling in circles, which develops many small muscles rarely used in the stroke, as well as the neuromuscular pattern that controls it.”

SKY CHRISTOPHERSON

NOT LONG AFTER Sky Christopherson joined the Washington Athletic Club in January 2007, he worked with Wayne to add a new category to the Athletic Memberships: Olympic Athlete. "I helped pioneer the program that will be giving sponsorship to athletes currently training for the Olympics," he says, adding that sprint canoeist Jordan Malloch (see next section) was the first one.

Sky understands the importance of a supportive training environment for up-and-coming athletes. A former member of the U.S. National Cycling Team, he won his first national title at age 19, beating a six-time undefeated cyclist. "My specialty was the 1,000-meter time trial," he says, adding that it's also called the "kilo." During this minute-long event, he says, a sprinter's body undergoes drastic changes. "The kilo is the most painful event in sprint cycling," Sky explains, adding that a cyclist's levels of lactic acid surge through the bloodstream during those 60 seconds. "Under those conditions, your blood turns to battery acid," he says. "It hurts everywhere." When that happens, he says, his goal is to overcome his limits. So far, so good.

In fact, Sky was a U.S. Cycling Team alternate for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta and the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia. "In '96, I was third at the Olympic Trials, and in 2000, I won," he says. "In 2000, it was pretty controversial. I had won, yet there was an additional selection and I wasn't selected for the final team." He continued training, aiming for the 2004 Olympics in Athens, but broke his femur

in a bike crash. Unable to recover in time for the games, he decided to retire from competitive racing. (When he was racing at the international level, he never ranked lower than ninth in the world.)

Sky traded training sessions with top coach Andrzej Bek for workouts at the WAC—and discovered unexpected advantages. "I have noticed that the trainers and classes are really up on cutting-edge science," he says. "In a way, it seems just as scientific [as Olympic training]. The difference is that they don't produce performance at all costs—literally at the cost, for instance, of tearing your knee apart. At the WAC, there's awareness of *not* damaging your body."

Nowadays, Sky lifts weights in Coed Conditioning a few times each week, takes spin classes and indulges in massages in the Spa. He's also looking for fellow cyclists to ride with him. "Working so many hours a week, I needed everything to be together in one place," Sky says. "The WAC is just so efficient."

As when he's on the track, Sky is always on the move in his life. He and his wife, Tamara Jenkins, a kayaker at the Sydney Olympics, are working on the Internet startup Vicaso.net, a high-tech real estate imaging system (think online tours in hi-def). He's also in postproduction on his first film, *The Greater Meaning of Water*, about what makes an elite athlete's performances extraordinary.



JORDAN MALLOCH

BY AGE 13, Jordan Malloch was racing canoes on Seattle's Green Lake. By age 16, he won the U.S. Junior National Championships in the one-man 500-meter and two-man 1,000-meter canoe races. With those wins, he set his sights on the Olympics—and made it both to the 2000 games in Sydney, Australia, and to the 2004 games in Athens, Greece.

"It was an incredible honor to represent the United States in Australia," says the 29-year-old WAC member. "I was the only U.S. canoeist there, and in Athens, I raced the two-man canoe with Nate Johnson, who's also from Seattle." In both international events, he made it to the semifinals, with European canoeing powerhouses from Hungary, Germany and Spain taking the medals.

Last year, Sky Christopherson (see above) encouraged Jordan to join the WAC and train with him, thanks to some help from Wayne and Athletic Program Manager Darin Barr. Sky's wife, Tamara Jenkins, was Jordan's teammate on the 2004 Olympics canoe/kayak team.

Once a member, Jordan took advantage of the WAC facilities as he continued his quest to reach the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Not only did he spend copious hours paddling on Seattle's Green Lake, but he also relied on several WAC services. "I lifted weights quite a lot, swam there—especially in the winter—and ran on the treadmill," he says. "Having the facilities all in one place to let me train and recover [from workouts] was definitely helpful."

Following a training regimen created for him at the ARCO Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, Calif., Jordan regularly arrived at Green Lake between 6 and 6:30 am six days a week. After two hours of paddling, he would lift weights at the WAC for the next two hours. Not done yet, he'd return to Green Lake for 90 more minutes of paddling, followed by about 30 minutes of running. "We usually had Sunday off," he says.

Olympic canoeing is light years beyond a leisurely paddle through the Washington Park Arboretum. In a long, lean craft sitting barely

JORDAN MALLOCH

SPRINT CANOEING

Jordan starts his morning workouts early, paddling his way around Green Lake.



A KNACK FOR SNACKING

"Bookending a strength workout with a protein supplement is the best way to take advantage of muscle growth. For a longer aerobic workout, make sure you have enough muscle glycogen in your system by having a snack 30 minutes before you start training."



CAROL CORAM
TRIATHALONS

Carol builds stamina by taking her training to the trails.

BUILDING BLOCKS

“Your fitness level includes muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiovascular endurance and flexibility. Concentrate on building these parts of fitness first. The WAC has yoga and Pilates classes, as well as weight training equipment. Work with a trainer to avoid injury. The skill-related parts of fitness (power, coordination and speed) will come in time as you gradually increase your workout intensity.”

above the water, Olympic-caliber flat-water canoeists position themselves on one knee and dig their paddles into the water. With about 230 to 240 carefully measured strokes, Jordan would speed through a 1,000-meter race.

In April, Jordan finished first at the U.S. Olympic Trials in both the one- and two-man races. At the World Championships, he finished 10th, and at the Pan American Games, third. By early summer 2008, he was ranked 10th in the world. Unfortunately, when the International Canoe Federation allocated the canoeists for Beijing, Jordan wasn't one of them. “No one is representing the United States in canoes this year,” he says, adding that this country was allocated only one male and

one female kayaker. “I was hoping the ICF would make a different decision, but I understand.”

Although Jordan now plans to retire from Olympic canoeing, don't expect to see him standing on the sidelines. He's got his sights set on stand-up paddle boarding and outrigger canoeing. He also plans to get involved with WAC committee work, saying, “I'll probably be even more involved in the Club going forward.”



CAROL CORAM

UNTIL TITLE IX PASSED IN 1972, stipulating equal educational opportunities (including athletics) for both genders, female athletes were running uphill in a culture skeptical that “the weaker sex” could be serious athletes. Running track from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, **Carol Coram** experienced that skepticism firsthand—and overcame it.

A member of the Washington Athletic Club for 13 years, Carol began running as a young girl in White Plains, New York. She recalls the highlight of each summer: a huge field day for local day camps. Handily defeating her running competition, Carol caught the notice of Dr. Charles Blanford, a local patron of gifted athletes. He introduced himself to her parents, and soon she was training on a cinder track just behind his house. “He's been one of my lifelong mentors,” says Carol, adding that he helped pave the way when pre-Title IX snags arose. “He was ahead of his time.”

When Carol attended Bradley University in Peoria, Ill., she recalls, “I was known as the only female jock on campus.” Because there was no women's track team, she trained with the men's team. “It was just like I had a little brotherhood,” she laughs. “I was a part of the team without being a part of the team.”



After college, she ran the 200-meter dash and 4x4 relays at the club level, eventually qualifying for the National Track and Field Championships. Still, the local Kiwanis Club declined to name

her Athlete of the Week in spite of her trainer's nomination. “I figure I had three things against me at the time,” she says. “I was young, female and black.”

By age 32, Carol retired as a competitor and became an educator, coach and technical official for USA Track and Field. She coached high school boys' track in Elmsford, N.Y., and Hartford, Conn., and coached at the United States Military Academy at West Point. She also worked to become a technical official for the International Association of Athletics Federations and officiated over the long jump and triple jump at the XXVI Olympics in Atlanta.

Wife of former **WAC Chairman Ammon McWashington**, Carol is now principal of Seattle's Arbor Heights Elementary School. She has also chaired the Athletics, Programs and House committees at the WAC, among others, and she sits on USA Track and Field's Technical Official, National Ethics and Official Selections committees. Oh, and she's not done competing, either.

“When I started doing triathlons, I began using more of the WAC services—spinning classes, swimming, weights and yoga for the flexibility,” she says, adding that the triathlons include swimming, biking and running. Since then, she's competed in such events as the Danskin Triathlon, Subaru Women's Series and Cascades Edge in Enumclaw. “In the three years I've been doing them,” she says, “I've made more than a 16-minute improvement in my time.”

Her secret? “I ask myself if I can take a minute off the best time from the year before and then try to do that,” she explains. “Whatever you're doing, you can always do it better—but *better* may not be a better time. It may be coming across the finish line and still feeling strong.”

JILL BELL

HOME THIS SUMMER after playing professional basketball in Spain during the 2007–2008 season, **Jill Bell** has been thoroughly enjoying her athletic membership at the Washington Athletic Club. “I’m really excited and happy I joined,” says the former standout Washington Husky forward. “It’s been a perfect match for me at this time of my life.”

As she awaits her next step with the International Basketball Association, Bell has taken full advantage of WAC resources for her frequent two- to four-hour workouts. She lifts weights at least three times a week, does regular cardio workouts and more. She even found a basketball team to help her stay sharp: the Washington Athletic Club women’s basketball team, led by player/coach **Erika Ensign**. “This program just started last year, and we’ve joined a few leagues,” says Jill, adding that many of the players, like her, played on top NCAA Division I and II teams. This year, the team finished second in both regional and national conference tournaments. (In both tournaments, the Olympic Athletic Club from Northern California finished first. “We have a little bit of a rivalry between us now,” she says.)

The level of play for the WAC team ties in nicely with Jill’s requirements—to play hard with top athletes. “My philosophy of training is built around being able to compete with other professional-level athletes,” she explains.

Jill didn’t start playing basketball until she attended Bellevue High School. At 6 feet, she attracted the attention of the coach. Already a long jumper and hurdler, she agreed to give the sport a try. “I just loved it,” she admits. “Basketball is all about being on a team; in track, you have to be self-motivated.”

After high school, Jill played for the Huskies and excelled. The 31 shots she blocked in her sophomore year rank fourth on the UW’s all-time single-season accomplishments. While wearing the purple and gold, Jill racked up 809 points and 605 rebounds. She took that talent to Spain last season, donning the uniform of Madrid’s Canal de Isabel team. There was just one little problem.

“My coach didn’t speak English,” says Jill, who had taken French in high school. “My roommate did, but none of the other girls did.”

By the end of the season, she could understand more than she spoke—and enjoyed the universal language of basketball. “I had an unbelievably good experience,” she says, adding that the self-motivation she cultivated running high-school track paid off amid the language barriers.

In August, Jill hopes to be catching a flight back to Europe, joining another team or Canal de Isabel for a second season. Does she want to play in the United States? It’s not a goal, she says, “but if the opportunity came, I would take it.”

SOLID TO THE CORE

“Every athlete can benefit from core stability training. It doesn’t matter what sport you play, core training is an essential part of becoming elite at your position, sport or training program. I suggest starting with 15-20 second holds and then progressing to 30 seconds and then one minute holds—three to five rounds once per day.”

JILL BELL BASKETBALL



POSITION OF STRENGTH

“Core strengthening exercises and activities are worth their weight in gold. Do them.”



RYAN & JENNIFER VANGORDER ADVENTURE RACING



WOUTER KINGMA (2)
The Vangorders conquered reef, rainforest and the Outback to finish fourth in XPD Australia 2007, a world championship qualifier.

RYAN & JENNIFER VANGORDER

A YOUNG SPORT that began in the late 1980s, adventure racing appeals to elite athletes who are slightly, well, unique. They thrive on races that last from hours to days and days—and include orienteering, mountain biking, climbing, paddling and possibly more. One of the many endurance-minded athletes taking on the sport’s challenge is WAC member (**John**) **Ryan VanGorder**.

While watching *Eco-Challenge: The Expedition Race* on the Discovery Channel a few years ago, he became intrigued. “I think we had just enough beers to convince ourselves we could do it,” he says, laughing. He and a few friends entered a three- to six-hour adventure race in Canada, raced, lived to tell about it, and were hooked. “Each time, we kept pushing ourselves and our limits,” he says. Ryan and the team continued to enter adventure races and within a year, they decided to enter a 24-hour one. “At the time, it was the craziest thing I’d done,” he admits, adding that his first 24-hour event was near Oregon’s Mount Hood—and included an 85-mile leg of mountain biking, a 22-mile leg of kayaking on the Columbia River and a 20-mile trek (“a mix of running, walking, hiking and scrambling”) on the northeast side of the mountain. The team finished, he says, in 24 hours and 1 minute.

Most adventure races involve four coed members per race. Ryan’s team is DART-nuun, with a roster of 10 members, including his wife, **Jennifer**. Together, the team has adventure-raced around the world: Australia; Brazil; Baja, Mexico; Newfoundland; Colombia; and elsewhere. They race in Portugal this December. “We’re a competitive national

and international team,” Ryan says. “And we’re the top-ranked regional team.”

Ryan and his teammates adhere to a mind-boggling training schedule. “We train for all sports,” he says. “Most of us are jacks of all trades and masters of none.” He trains 15 to 20 hours each week and, because he is a financial analyst at Blackrock Inc. in downtown Seattle, he gets creative with his workouts. The easy part is biking to work each day from West Seattle; working out at the WAC on lunch breaks (playing hoops with fellow member **Blake Cornell**, weightlifting or working with trainers **Shaine Rogers** or **Roy Coleman**, and then biking home after work). He and his wife’s longest workouts happen on weekends.

On a typical Saturday, they may leave their house on road bikes, travel around the south end of Lake Washington, ride to May Valley, lock up their bikes at Issaquah High School—and run up Tiger Mountain. They’ll bike home around the north end of the lake. “Sometimes we start from downtown, because we get a little bit more of a workout,” Ryan says. “Then we use the WAC sauna and hot tub. It’s great to finish on a good note and relax our muscles.”

Why does he push himself to such extremes for a sport? “It’s part of what makes me happy,” he says simply. “At the end of a 500-mile, six-day race, there’s nothing like popping the cork out of a champagne bottle and celebrating—or eating a gallon of ice cream.” ❄️

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