



# *A Master of* **DETERMINATION**



*Olympic  
Javelin  
Thrower*  
**ROALD  
BRADSTOCK**  
*on Rethinking  
What is  
Possible*

{ WRITTEN BY  
HEATHER KW BROWN }

PHOTO TAKEN ON LOCATION  
AT HORSESHOE BEND  
COUNTRY CLUB, ROSWELL, GA

**D**RESSED IN ONE of his hand-painted javelin uniforms, Roald Bradstock sat in a lawn chair holding a paintbrush and his breath. Initially drawn to the tiny air bubbles floating from the paintbrush to the surface, I was ultimately struck by the fact that he, too, would soon need to come up for air. He was at the bottom of a pool, looking calm and completely unflustered as he stared directly into the underwater camera. Few Olympic athletes would dare to do the same — and that's exactly how he wants it.

Pushing boundaries is part passion and part entertainment for 50-year-old Bradstock, who defied his age and countless odds by winning a silver medal in the javelin throw at the Olympic Trials in London last month, earning recognition as the oldest athlete in any event at

the 2012 Trials and the oldest medalist in any event in nearly 76 years. Weeks later, Bradstock packed his bags for another international flight, this time as a professional artist en route to Hong Kong, where his artwork is currently on exhibit. And with his sights now set on introducing the connection between sports and art to kids of all ages and abilities, it seems he is just warming up.

#### **— Rethinking Impossible as I'm Possible**

I first met Bradstock at a coffee shop in Sandy Springs, where he flashed a quick and friendly smile before launching into his story. It is a story of, well, launching things — javelins, fish, iPods and almost a cow patty — while never losing sight of his dream to become an Olympic athlete or forgetting just how fortunate he is to

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**“Top javelin athletes can hit 70 mph, throwing a stick that weighs 2 pounds and is almost 9 feet long, and I’m 50. My approach is to rethink the whole approach.”**

ROALD BRADSTOCK | Olympic Athlete

have the ability to walk at all. His expression throughout our long conversation conveyed a comfortable look of determination, one that almost dares you to say he can't.

That look, according to Bradstock, dates back to 1968.

“I was 6 years old, parked in front of a little black and white TV in my parents’ kitchen to watch the 1968 Olympic games,” Bradstock recalled. “I said, ‘I want to do that one day.’ Around the same time, I was diagnosed with spina bifida. I [had been] getting headaches and my mother, who was a nurse, became concerned.”

Bradstock spoke of how he had to go to the hospital every three to six months for quite some time. “One of my earliest memories is at the hospital,” he said. “The doctor asked me to get up and walk to the other side of the room. So I did, and I remember him saying I shouldn't be able to do that.”

He also said Bradstock shouldn't play sports. Apparently that was exactly what

the youngster needed to hear. Grateful for his health and the realization that sometimes the impossible happens, Bradstock has held on tightly to both, continuously challenging himself to do what no one thinks or expects him to do.

Born in the UK, Bradstock came to the United States in 1981 on a full scholarship to Southern Methodist University (SMU) for javelin. After graduating from SMU with an art degree, he moved around the country before becoming a U.S. citizen in 1995. He was an alternate for the U.S. Olympic team in '96 and shortly thereafter, decided to call Atlanta home.

With Atlanta as his new home base, he trained for the '00, '04 and '08 U.S. Olympic Trials, and with each new round came another set of challenges. “At Stanford once, the field judge asked me to leave the field because no coaches were allowed during the competition,” Bradstock recalled with a smirk. “And during a meet at the University of Georgia, I was denied

access [to the field] until they were literally calling my name to throw. That's happened about three or four times. Now, I'm not only older than the athletes but also their coaches, their parents and I'm getting close to some officials,” he laughed.

In a sport notorious for injuries and against athletes almost 30 years younger, Bradstock has had to change how he prepares for high levels of competition. “Top javelin athletes can hit 70 mph, throwing a stick that weighs 2 pounds and is almost 9 feet long, and I'm 50. My approach is to rethink the whole approach.”

Counting this year, Bradstock has contended in eight Olympic Trials, and has discovered a few secrets along the way. “There's an art and technique to throwing anything. I throw the javelin, which is basically a stick. [Many] people don't know what a javelin is, but everyone knows what an iPod is. So [throwing one] gets people engaged,” said Bradstock, whose video of throwing one of his daughter's old iPods

has become a big hit on YouTube. “It's amazing. I've been challenged around the world to throw things: pebbles in Sicily, sardines in Australia and cow “pats” in the Midwest — I declined that one.”

While his fellow competitors attempt to understand how he has outsmarted Father Time to balance his record of four British and four American Olympic Trials, Bradstock has already carved another niche for himself elsewhere.

**The Art of Connecting Kids to Sports**

Bradstock's personal artistic style is the repetition of lines and shapes to create visual energy. From his eye-catching uniforms and matching hand-painted javelins, his talent has garnered national and international attention. In 2000, he won the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Sport Art Competition; in 2003, he won the prestigious International Sports Artist of the Year award, which earned him the nickname Olympic Picasso; and, this year, he is in the mix again with a painting of a triumphant runner for the Graphic Works category in the 2012 U.S. Olympic Sport and Art Contest.

“As far as being an athlete and being an artist ... combining the two is unusual,” Bradstock readily admitted. “Athletes push their bodies to the limit and beyond. Artists push the boundaries of how far a medium can go. My goal as an artist and athlete is to do both and always ask questions.”

Much like becoming an Olympian, Bradstock developed a strong interest in art at an early age. Dissatisfied with store-bought toy soldiers whose arms and legs were static, he made his own army of men — thousands of them — from plasticine, material best described as an oil-based Play-doh that doesn't dry out or harden.

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He currently holds the world record for making a toy soldier in less than 20 seconds, yet another video you can watch on the Internet.

Call it embracing his sense of humor or forward thinking with the help of technology, but Bradstock, a father himself, has created a fun, competitive-free connection

for kids between two of his favorite pastimes, and launched a personal new passion in the process.

“I’ve been teaching and working to create programs for kids, so far by flying back and forth to the UK,” he said. “I always start the Sport Art instruction with a survey. I’ll ask if anyone thinks there is a

connection, and maybe one or two hands will go up. By the end of the class, everyone gets it.”

The overall principle behind Sport Art is to promote athletics through imagery, using primarily two different mediums, plasticine and collage. Bradstock explained that a range of sport images are pulled from websites and printed. Those pages are then placed underneath a piece of plexiglass, which serves as a template for children of all ages and abilities to recreate their image using plasticine. Bradstock shared stories about kids in special needs classes who, despite physical restrictions or the inability to steady their hands, were able to create works of art, amazing themselves and instilling a sense of confidence that even their teachers hadn’t previously witnessed.

The intrinsic value of these connections is obvious: those who couldn’t now could, and kids who wouldn’t entertain the idea of art if they were sports fanatics, or vice versa, now would. In essence, they are modifying their approach, using creativity to circumvent their limitations and reaching their full potential. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

“I’ve spent all of my life as an athlete and an artist,” Bradstock said. “[Traveling] from the UK to USA, I was lost in the shuffle. The question I had to keep asking myself is ‘What distinguishes you from the pack?’ It eventually becomes about time.”

After years of traveling overseas or, in this case, hours of taking photos underwater, the time has finally come for Bradstock to come up for air in Atlanta. **PN**



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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

This fall/winter, Bradstock is launching throwing camps across the country for baseball players as well as javelin athletes. To learn more about these camps or his Sport Art classes for kids, visit [roaldbradstock.com](http://roaldbradstock.com).