

# Carrying her weight

World-class weightlifter answers the call to join the U.S. bobsled team

**Ingrid Marcum held an outside hope that she could qualify for the Summer Olympics, but her destiny may be with the Winter Team, instead.**

By SAMANTHA FARLOW

**T**here were so many times Ingrid Marcum's athletic career could have ended.

She estimates much of her eight years of high school and college gymnastics was spent rehabbing something — a broken hand, torn ankle, ripped-up knee.

"I spent a lot of time just coming back. I think that's what keeps me interested, because I never reached where my talent could have taken me," she said.

While the 27-year-old Elmhurst resident's gymnastics days are over, her future as an Olympian may be just beginning.

Marcum left Jan. 17 for Lake Placid, N.Y., site of the 1932 and 1980 Olympic Winter Games for a week of bobsled training at the Verizon Sports Complex, culminating in the America's Cup competition. All the hardware — equipment — and instruction — is there to keep up with her six-day-a-week sprinting and lifting workouts.

At the end of the month, the York High School alumna heads to Germany to face some of the world's best bobsledders.

By summer she just might be back overseas representing the United States at the Summer Games in Athens, Greece. Not as a bobsledder, but as a weightlifter.

"My focus is still on weightlifting," said Marcum, who will vie for one of two spots on the U.S. women's weightlifting team. "Two women for the whole country ... I would like to believe there's always a possibility, (but) those two spots are pretty much spoken for (by Tara Nott Cunningham and Jackie Berube)."

Still, for the former Colonial Athletic Conference Academic All-American gymnast at the College of William and Mary, the rise to the national spotlight — first as a weightlifter and now as a bobsledder — has been rapid.

"After college I started lifting. I was a strength coach (at William and Mary) and they like you to be certified in Olympic-style lifting," said Marcum, who also works as a personal trainer at Health Quest Fitness in



Richard Bajalieh/Pioneer Press

**Ingrid Marcum works as a personal trainer at Health Quest Fitness in Palatine, but is currently training with the U.S. Women's Bobsled Team in hopes of qualifying for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy.**

Palatine. "I always liked lifting. I had been lifting since I was about 8 as a supplement to gymnastics, but I didn't know anything about Olympic style.

"A lot of the qualities I had from gymnastics — the strength, flexibility, balance, coordination — helped me (in weightlifting)."

She proved a quick study, immediately impressing the certification coaches who encouraged her to compete. In December 2000, her first venture into competitive lifting, she placed fourth at the Olympic-qualifying American Open. By June 2001, she was making even bigger strides, finishing second at the World Team Trials in Irving, Texas.

Competing mainly in the 75-kilogram division, the second highest of seven women's divisions, Marcum has toured the country in the last three-plus years, continuously adding to her weightlifting resume.

Among her numerous

achievements in 2003 was the Illinois State Championship in the 69-kilogram weight class. She also participated in the American Open, again aiming for an Olympic qualifying spot. She collected about 85 percent of the total score needed to meet the Olympic standard.

There are four events during the season where Marcum can add to her running tally in hopes of improving her ranking.

Currently she is No. 16 in the country, with two qualifiers remaining.

"The Olympic Trials (in May) are neat to see. Most people already have an existing ranking and are just going for broke on their lifts, trying for an American record," said Marcum, who works with 1992 Olympic weights coach Roger Neilson and current national weightlifting coach Mike Gattone.

The explosively fast, yet controlled, movements of Olympic lifting —

where competitors either raise the bar straight overhead from a full squat position (snatch) or flip it to shoulder height before raising it overhead (clean and jerk) — results in a rather objective score.

Either a lifter can elevate the weight or not. It's a simple pass/fail system quite opposite the more subjective gymnastics scoring Marcum was accustomed to.

"While there are certain techniques the judges can rule out, as long as I get that bar over my head I've done it. That's that. In gymnastics, sometimes it's disappointing, but that's gymnastics," she said.

While her gymnastics skills helped her with weightlifting, her increased time in the weight room helped her chances as a bobsledder.

"Usually with bobsledders they look for people from other sports," said Marcum, who was approached to try the bobsled while at a weightlifting event in Las Vegas in the summer of 2002. "A lot of weightlifting is very complementary to bobsledding. I was already doing sprint training for weights. I have good strength and power.

"Bobsledders are definitely not small. The sleigh with the riders has to be a certain weight, so the heavier to be a certain weight, so the heavier the riders, the lighter the sleigh can be, which makes it easier to push and faster at the start," Marcum said.

"Actually, the conflict I have is having to cut weight for lifting meets. I am usually just under 165 pounds for lifting and for bobsledding they want me a little bit bigger."

As a brakeman, she starts the two-person sled down its icy course, generating the power and speed so essential to fast times.

She is, in the end, also responsible for stopping the sled with a metal, claw-like brake that digs into the ice. Her partner is the driver and bears the burden of the race's outcome.

"It depends on your driver as to how you finish," she said. "There is a saying that you can't win a race at the start; you can lose it."

Marcum is joining the women's bobsled team as the program itself is on the rise having debuted as an Olympic sport in 2002. Still she knows the competition is there.

"Before I couldn't commit fully because of the weights," she said. "But if I want to make the (Olympic) bobsled team I will have to focus (after weightlifting trials in May)."

For now, staying injury-free as she aims to reach her athletic potential should keep her well on course.

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