

Then you'd have to quit for two weeks and get your body back and go at it again. I don't know if age had anything to do with it, but it's how my body reacted to it. When I would go 200 to 300 miles a week, man, I would pay for it. I must say that I would never do it again to get to that level of excellence."

## GERALD VAUGHN: MOURNING A LOSS

Gerald Vaughn's wife of 40 years was dying of cancer. He would come home from work and take care of her. If he wasn't with her, he'd mope around the house. Maybe, she told him, he should get some exercise. Maybe he ought to try tossing his old shot around. Vaughn (born in 1935) found an old 12-pounder from high school and started throwing it into a backyard garden. It was the first time he had thrown it in 38 years. "I really did it to alleviate the stress," he said. "Darn, if it didn't feel pretty good!"

At the 2001 National Masters Track & Field Championships in Baton Rouge, Vaughn told me of his conversion from couch potato to one of the top over-60 shot putters in the country. He had thrown at the University

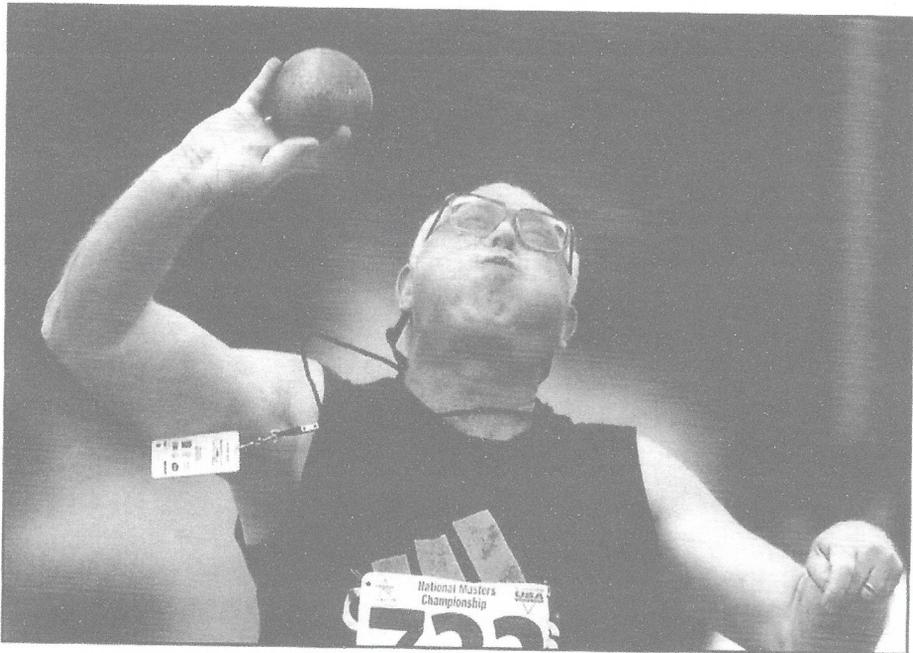


Photo courtesy of William E. Vaughn, Jr.

Gerald Vaughn's strategy for shot put: Each throw must be "violent."

of Richmond but had a middling collegiate career. A friend at Harvard was throwing 10 feet (about 3 m) farther at the same time.

When Vaughn started back again, he began throwing with Floyd “Chunk” Simmons, a fellow resident of Charlotte, North Carolina. Simmons was a bronze medalist in the decathlon in the 1948 and 1952 Olympics. “Chunk told me, ‘Jerry, you’re good,’ and that’s all he had to say,” Vaughn recalled. “But he told me that I was going to have to lift weights.”

By that time, Vaughn’s wife had died. His children were married and he was coming home to an empty house. “I really needed to work out because I had nothing at home,” he said. “That motivated me to really practice.”

He started slowly, but he began lifting more and more weight. “I was doing phenomenal things in the weight room,” he told me matter-of-factly. The year before we met, in 2000, he lifted 6.5 million pounds (almost 3 million kg) with his upper body and 8.1 million pounds (about 3.7 million kg) with his lower body. He threw the shot 4,005 times. His goal was 4,000 times a year, so a week before the end of a month, if he wasn’t on

## Internet Resources for Masters Athletes

Clarence Bass—Bodybuilding & Fitness Home Page: [www.cbass.com](http://www.cbass.com)

European Veterans Athletic Association (track and field): [www.evaa.ch](http://www.evaa.ch)

Fédération Internationale de Natation [International Swimming Federation]: [www.fina.org](http://www.fina.org)

International Masters’ Speed Skating Committee / ISU Masters’ Speed Skating Working Group: [www.imssc.org](http://www.imssc.org)

International Powerlifting Federation: [www.powerlifting-ipf.com](http://www.powerlifting-ipf.com)

*Masters Athlete* magazine: [www.masters-athlete.com](http://www.masters-athlete.com)

Masters Athlete Physiology and Performance: <http://home.hia.no/~stephens>

Masters Athletics (track and field): [www.mastersathletics.net](http://www.mastersathletics.net)

MastersTrack.com: [www.masterstrack.com](http://www.masterstrack.com)

National Masters News: [www.nationalmastersnews.com](http://www.nationalmastersnews.com)

The President’s Challenge—Adult Fitness Test: [www.adultfitnessstest.org](http://www.adultfitnessstest.org)

United States Masters Swimming: [www.usms.org](http://www.usms.org)

USA Powerlifting: [www.usapowerlifting.com](http://www.usapowerlifting.com)

USA Triathlon: [www.usatriathlon.org](http://www.usatriathlon.org)

World Masters Athletics (track and field): [www.world-masters-athletics.org](http://www.world-masters-athletics.org)

schedule, he would walk into his backyard where he had built a shot put ring and start throwing. "However many it takes to get to that total, I will do it," he told me.

At 65, Vaughn was 6-foot-3 (190.5 cm) and weighed 250 pounds (113 kg). His massive biceps were punctuated with Harley-Davidson tattoos on each arm. By outward appearances, he was a man you didn't want to mess with. But seated in the stands of a gymnasium at Louisiana State University, Vaughn was a Southern gentleman with a playful air. The tattoos, he told me with a wink, were pasted on to psyche out the competition. "I want them to think that I am rough and tough," he said.

Each year he trained harder. And each year he got better. He was convinced he would break records in the shot for years to come. "I have not had the perfect throw—not even once," he said. Once a thrower has developed good technique and strength and mastered the art of pushing a heavy ball as far as possible, "you should have a perfect throw one or two times a season," he said. "I haven't had a single perfect throw. That's what I am working toward."

Vaughn, a retired human resources manager, remarried two years after his wife died. His new wife, Becki, a runner who competes in 10Ks and marathons, also took up the shot and is nationally ranked in the 60-to-64 age group. They met through a family connection: Becki, whose husband died in 1990, is the mother of Vaughn's son-in-law.

In 2007 when I caught up with him, Vaughn was nearly 72 and weighed 265 pounds. He had added 15 pounds (6.8 kg) of muscle. In six years, he had become stronger and was throwing the shot farther.

Vaughn doesn't lift free weights and relies instead on weight machines to reduce the chance of injury. He also wears braces on his wrists. He doesn't try to muster up a single big lift. Rather, he lifts as much as he can as many times and as fast as he can because the shot requires power and quickness. "Everything is fast because I want those fast-twitch muscles," he said. He does about 20 different lifts at the gym. In the fall of 2007, for the vertical chest press, which is like a bench press, Vaughn was lifting 285 pounds (129 kg) 59 times. (The weight on a machine is lighter than free weights.)

When he was getting ready for a big meet, he moved from his maintenance stage to doing three sets of all of the lifts as many times as he could. Even though he was lifting more, Vaughn had cut back on his throwing to once a week. He tried to pick a day that had weather conditions similar to what he might be facing in actual competition. After he warmed up, all of his throws were at maximum intensity. "I say to myself that each such throw is going to be violent," he said.

Vaughn has been USA Track & Field age-group champion, indoor and outdoor, eight consecutive years, including 2008. He has broken the world outdoor record three years in a row and held three world indoor records. With time, he has learned that achieving perfection is harder than he thought. In 2007, he traveled 13,000 miles (21,000 km) to compete in 19 meets. He competed so much because, despite his training, “exceptional” performance can be achieved, he believed, only 10 to 15 percent of the time.

Then in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 2006, he tossed a 4-kilogram (8.8-pound) shot 52 feet, 4.5 inches (almost 16 m)—nearly two feet farther than he had ever thrown before. A USATF-certified official was on hand to measure the throw. It should have been a world record, but the meet had not been sanctioned by USA Track & Field. Vaughn finally got his perfect throw, however. The shot seemed to glide off his hand. It felt, he said, “like a feather.”