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## Through the Point

Scott Fuchs

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**Through the Point: Creating a podcast with the stories of current and former javelin throwers to promote the sport within the United States and around the world**

by

**Scott Fuchs**

A creative component submitted to the graduate faculty

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:

Deni Chamberlin, Major Professor

Jan Lauren Boyles

Sridhar Ramaswami

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this creative component. The Graduate College will ensure this creative component is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2021

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to my former coach, Brian Bliese. Thank you for giving that “baseball player with an ego” the opportunity to try something new.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sport is something that a great majority of people are involved in at least once in their lives. In the United States, the media primarily focuses on the most popular professional sports like baseball, basketball, and football. A sport that does not receive as much attention is track and field. Events such as sprints and distance running often dominate the limited media attention that the sport receives. The throwing events, specifically the javelin throw, are often an afterthought in the track and field community for those not involved in the events. With this project, I have created a podcast to tell javelin throwers' stories through a series of interviews to promote the event throughout the United States and the world.

My goal with these interviews was that these' throwers untold stories would inspire listeners to either start to throw for the first time or continue to pursue their career further. I spoke with Olympians, All-Americans, national record-holders, as well as your average college throwers. These individuals provided perspective on their careers and shared how the event has enriched their lives and offered experiences that would otherwise not have happened. In this paper, I dive into the details of how I created my podcast, *Through the Point*.



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

High schoolers participating in athletics is not a new concept. In fact, in the 2018-2019 school year, roughly 8 million students participated in high school sports (NFHS, 2019). Eleven-player American football led the way with over 1 million participants and was followed by track and field at approximately 600,000 (NFHS, 2019). Additionally, track and field was the largest gainer in boys sports participation rate (NFHS, 2019). Despite that growth, the javelin throw event has been limited in US high schools for decades. As of 2016, only 20 states sanctioned the javelin throw as a high school track and field event (Simon, 2016). Some states have begun adding it in years since. However, the sport essentially has gone unrecognized and underappreciated in the US.

The javelin throw is not a new sport. It was “widely practiced in Ancient Greece and incorporated into the Olympic Games in 708BC as part of the pentathlon. It has been part of the modern Olympic Games programme since 1908 for men, and 1932 for women” (“World Athletics: Javelin Throw” n.d, para. 5). The event involves throwing an 800-gram spear for men and 600-gram for women with the goal of maximum distance within a defined sector. Despite its ancient origins, it has not resulted in significant participation or success for American throwers, specifically in recent years.

The United States is the single winningest track and field program in Olympic history. The United States has won three times more medals than any other country, including 324 gold medals, 244 silver medals, and 196 bronze medals (Fleming, 2018). However, that success has not been shared within the javelin throw. An American male thrower has not reached an Olympic final since 2004, with a medal not being won since 1972 (“An Analysis of US Men’s Javelin”, 2018). Likewise, an American woman has not won an Olympic medal since 1976 (“Athletics: javelin

throw women”, 2020). For a country with such a rich history of athletics, specifically track and field, it is unfortunate that that success has not been shared in this event.

To encourage participation in the javelin throw, it first needs to receive more exposure and awareness through the United States and the world. I interviewed many of the world’s top throwers as well as regular everyday athletes to get a better understanding of their stories and careers. This platform could potentially inspire new throwers to pick up a javelin or for those already involved to stay motivated in their pursuit for success. By hearing from some of the greatest and some throwers more like them, high school athletes can learn from their success and mistakes and ultimately drive the sport forward.

This paper will provide the structure for which I created a podcast to further the javelin throw in the United States and other countries. As a javelin community member myself, I understood what things I would like to hear from other athletes and provide those for others. I conducted dozens of interviews throughout a number of months and produced 42 episodes for my podcast called *Through the Point*. I also promoted the podcast on an Instagram page under the same name in addition to creating the podcast. At the time of writing this, my Instagram page is at approximately 7,000 followers, and the podcast has over 12,000 listens. I created these episodes with the intention of making them informative, relatable, and inspirational for athletes involved or interested in throwing the javelin. Finally, in this paper, I will look back on the process of how this podcast was developed and critically analyze aspects that could be changed, improved, or otherwise altered as the project continues forward.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although they are new relative to other forms of media, podcasts have grown to be one of the most popular media forms in the US. Athletes, celebrities, musicians, and everyone in between have not only been consuming podcasts but participating in them as well. A podcast is "a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new installments of which can be received by subscribers automatically" (Winn, 2021, para. 2). Outlets such as the New York Times and NPR offer news-related podcasts. However, there are many other motivations for listening to podcasts. The most popular podcast category in October 2020 was comedy, followed by news, true crime, and sport ("Leading Podcast Genres US", 2021).

The growth of podcasts over the past two decades is nothing short of amazing. In 2006, only 22% of the US population was familiar with the term podcasts, while that number is now 75% in 2020 (Aslam, 2021). In addition to the medium's overall awareness, there were 75 million monthly US listeners in 2018. That number is expected to reach 164 million by 2024 ("Leading Podcast Genres US", 2021). While many companies are making their own platforms to consume podcasts, the industry is still dominated by Spotify and Apple. 25% of users age 18 and older used Spotify to consume their podcasts, and 20% used Apple ("Top Apps for Listening to Podcasts", 2021).

My initial thought for a project involving the javelin throw was to host a camp in Ames and create a website to promote it. This idea created several logistical issues and also limited the potential reach of the project. With Doctor Jan Boyles' help, we decided on a podcast and using the social media platform Instagram to promote it. My previous research in the Greenlee school involved effective social media strategies on Instagram, so this pairing was a very natural decision. With my skill set and familiarity with the online javelin community, it made sense to pursue this

to create a more streamlined project and have a much larger audience to, hopefully, influence and inspire.

Although I would hope that people of any age would enjoy my podcast, I aimed to target athletes around the 16-24 demographic. These high school and college-age athletes are the ones that need to be motivated or interested in the sport to grow it in the years to come. With this target demographic in mind, it made sense to create the podcast and Instagram page due to their popularity with that audience. Age 12-24 is the fastest-growing podcast listener demographic. They feature the most significant percentage of the population who listen, at 40% listening on a monthly basis in 2019 (Land, 2020). As the age demographic gets older, a smaller share of the population listens on a monthly basis. However, for the target audience for this project, it was an incredibly effective medium to pursue.

Also, it was essential to create something mobile and easily accessible. I consume most of my podcasts while driving. However, that is not the norm, as one study showed 90% of people consume podcasts from the comfort of their own homes (Lin, 2021). Regardless of where they are being consumed, having the flexibility to actively or passively listen was a great driver in deciding to do a podcast. It also was driven by the fact that most podcasts are consumed on smartphones. Among weekly listeners of podcasts, 77% consumed the audio through their smartphone (Inside Radio, 2019). This statistic fits very well with the target audience's smartphone usage. In 2018, Americans aged 18-24 showed the smartphone market's most extensive penetration, with 94% saying they owned a smartphone (O'Dea, 2020). Not only does this demographic own a smartphone, but they also interact with them highly. The average American checks their smartphone approximately 47 times per day. For those aged 18-24, the number nearly doubles to

84 times per day (“The Shiny New Addiction”, 2019). Thus, it was essential to create content built for the devices and platforms that the target audience will be checking most frequently.

Another motivation to use the podcast format was the length of run time. On average, a podcast runs for 41 minutes and 31 seconds (Misener, 2019). Thus, it was easier for me to engage with the guests and get past just the small talk on the surface. I also did not include any advertisements. So outside a brief introduction and some theme music, each episode was all content with that episode’s guest. This setup created a greater sense of connection between the conversation and the audience listening.

Podcasts are also an incredibly flexible and mobile medium. While I did not have the resources to create a television show, I could have produced a YouTube show or something that requires a visual component. However, I felt that this would be limiting due its need for more attention because of the audio and video parts. In one focus group, those surveyed felt that television (video) “was engaging—but not mobile enough. Despite being able to watch television content on portable screens, the need to view the screen was too restrictive for our podcast listeners” (Perks & Turner, 2018, pg. 103). As I mentioned previously, I personally use podcasts as entertainment while driving. The ability to consume them while completing another task felt like something the future listeners of my show would benefit from. Specifically for athletes, the ability to listen while training is a nice bonus and something I know some listeners have taken advantage of.

Consumers of podcasts listen for a variety of reasons. The main motivators have been found to be entertainment, information, and affinity towards the audio platform. Additionally, “motives were found to affect listening behaviors, including listening settings, width, depth, and routine of listening, and usage of competing audio media, such as regular radio, online radio, and streaming

music” (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020, pg. 1). This study echoed the findings of previous studies as well. In 2010, researchers found that motivations for consuming podcasts included entertainment, time shifting, library building, and favorable opinions towards discussion of the podcast with the listening community (McClung & Johnson, 2010). In knowing these factors, it made it clear what I needed to focus on providing throughout the course of the project. Consumers want to be entertained while also receiving information that can provide value to them. It was also important to create and maintain the Instagram page to generate that sense of community among those who listen.

An initial goal of this project was to travel to the 2020 Olympic Trials in Oregon to interview some of the nation’s top throwers in person. While the podcast medium was always the plan, the ability to travel was eliminated due to COVID-19. The trials were scheduled for early June and leading up to that point, the country was in a widespread lockdown. Also, nearly every athlete’s season was canceled ultimately, and the trials were postponed until 2021. Because of this, I could not complete what would have been a fantastic opportunity. Fortunately, however, I was prepared to handle this unforeseen situation. The American javelin community is tight-knit but quite spread out. States like Oregon and Pennsylvania have a number of throwers due to its implementation in high schools, but the plan was to interview through Zoom regardless of COVID. Logistically, it would not have been possible to travel and meet these people worldwide, so this did not hamper the project as a whole. The canceling of the season allowed for a fantastic opportunity for me to speak with some top athletes who would have been busy otherwise.

Many podcasts are available online now. In fact, in 2020, there were approximately 850,000 in existence (Lin, 2021). The idea of hosting a podcast was not new, and the market is already very crowded. However, I had the fantastic opportunity of being the first podcast dedicated

solely to the javelin throw. Major track entities like FloTrack and Gill athletics have track and field-related podcasts that may feature javelin throwers. However, at the time of its creation, none were specialized the way mine is. I believe that having the opportunity to be the innovator in the industry is fantastic but also very telling of why this sport has not grown the way many others have. Coming from a baseball background, I recognized that the culture around the javelin is very different. As I discussed in the abstract, the javelin throw and other field events often do not receive the same media attention as events like sprints and distance running do. Unfortunately, there is no data available to provide statistical evidence of this, but it is often a running joke in the throwing community. Creating this podcast allowed me to become a pioneer and bring much-needed energy to the community with a chance to inspire growth.

What allowed me to have a seamless transition into this podcast was my immersion in the javelin community. One of my fellow Greenlee students, Clay Paciorek, created a podcast where he was interviewing people younger than him with hopes of having listeners who are much younger than him. For my podcast, I was the target audience. I communicated daily with the javelin on Instagram, obsessively watching videos on YouTube, and hoping to become one of the great throwers. Because of this, I already understood the world and tried to execute what I thought it needed. I wanted to host a variety of guests from all skill levels. When we created the plan for the podcast, we intended on having 8-12 interviews. However, because the season was canceled, my graduation was delayed, and I had much more time to conduct interviews. Because of this, I ended up with, at the time of writing this, 42 interviews. These featured some of the best throwers in the United States and the world. They also featured more achievable athletes, such as a 38-year-old dad who began throwing as a form of exercise. The extended time allowed me to create a more

extensive pool of content that covered so many amazing stories. I believe this allowed me to grow even more and create a higher quality podcast overall.

Once I began recording the interviews, I followed a system that became very standardized for me. I recorded all of the interviews over Zoom, so it was more personal than just a phone call. This allowed me better understand the interviewee's interest in each question and make sure I am getting the most out of them. This came at the suggestion of my major advisor Deni Chamberlin. It was essential to make that personal connection because it was our first time speaking for the vast majority of my guests. Building that rapport with the guests allowed me to get them to open up and share more about their stories.

Two of the most critical strategies for an effective interview are planning and preparation and the art of listening (Trull, 1964). These were strategies that Professor Chamberlin and I had an extensive discussion about before I started. Before I conducted the interview, I did thorough research on the athlete/subject's background and career. I read up on their results/achievements and went to their Instagram to see if they had shared anything about injuries or significant obstacles they had overcome on their journey. With this information, I prepared a list of questions that served as a guide for myself and gave the interviewee an idea of what to expect. However, once the process got going, they would open up about stuff that was not available over the internet. This is where the ability to listen became so important. Another piece of advice Professor Chamberlain gave was not talking over the guest, especially in a Zoom interview. While it may sound more natural in person, the audio recording would sound awful with two people talking at once. This tip was something I carried with me throughout the entire process, and it allowed me to guide the interviews more effectively.



Although I did prepare question sheets for each guest, I reminded them that it was not a scripted interview and that I wanted it to be more like a conversation. I made sure to continue to ask about exciting topics and to move away from the ones the guest did not seem as receptive towards. Through the 40+ interviews, I began to get an idea of what types of questions people will respond positively towards, so there was a sort of “formula” I had mapped out. Despite it being a similar format each time, it was easier for me to maintain that conversational aspect and not create an awkward robotic interview.

COVID canceling the season and delaying my graduation was quite an unexpected turn of events. However, it allowed me to go much deeper into the interviews than usually would have been possible. My skills as an interviewer and my conversational skills in general improved immensely. Almost every interview was with someone I had never met before, so it was essential to make them feel comfortable before starting. The conversation would often go on for 15-20 minutes but what was incredibly rewarding was the conversation after. Although this did not happen in every interview, there was quite a number where we would end up talking for anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours after the interview ended. This let me know that I had a successful interview and that they responded very positively towards it. Because of this, some guests have either come back on the podcast or inquired about it.

By developing these skills, I felt I could provide a great product to help grow the sport. They seem to be very well received through the large number of listeners and followers as well as kind personal messages from people. I was someone new to the sport not too long ago, so if I can inspire more people to take that chance and see what it can do for them, it is incredibly gratifying. I hope that listeners take from the experiences of those I interviewed and learn something that will motivate them to continue pursuing the event of the javelin throw.

## CHAPTER 3. CREATIVE COMPONENT PROJECT

### The Idea

As I discussed briefly in the literature review, a podcast was not my original idea for the project. I knew the creative component was quite open-ended, so I knew doing something involving javelin would be really enjoyable for me. The part that did not change was the central idea: promoting the event/growing it in some capacity. I originally wanted to host a camp through the Ames Park District and use a website to promote the event. Even pre-covid, this featured some logistical issues, but now I am even more fortunate that we did not choose that route. Doctor Jan Boyles discussed projects previously done by students whose committee she served on. She mentioned someone had done a podcast and continued speaking about other projects, but I stopped her and said, "what if I did a podcast?". We talked it over a little and decided that was what I wanted to do. As a member of the javelin community, I knew this did not exist around javelin. As an avid podcast listener, it is something that I would have loved to be able to hear.

My next step was writing down whom I would want to have on my podcast. I knew the original plan was to have 8-12 guests, so I started making a list on my phone. I went far beyond that number, but I did end up starting with all of those 12. The fantastic thing about the javelin community is how willing they were to help. I messaged them all within a week, and every person said they would be honored to do it. Some of these guests' status gave me the confidence to reach out to some high-profile guests later on and build my credibility within the community. Once I had some guests selected, it was time for me to start recording. All the interviews were conducted on Zoom, and at the start, it was a pretty low-tech operation. Professor Chamberlin afforded me a tip from someone at NPR. Using the voice memos application on an iPhone as a microphone actually produces a decently high-quality recording. For the first few months, I had myself and my guests

use our phones as a microphone then having them send me the file so I could put them together in Audacity. This worked, but it sometimes required editing out random background noise, which was not picked up on the Zoom call. Ultimately, it turned out to be a straightforward process, and the guests told me they had no problem using this format.

Once I had the files in Audacity, I would sync them up to fit the proper timing of the conversation. Ultimately, I received ISU funding for the project, so I purchased a podcast microphone. The syncing was no longer necessary. I was able to record the recordings directly and remove that process. Most of the time, I did not need to make many edits. However, I reassured my guests that I could edit any errors they made, allowing them to relax more during the interview. I would record a short introduction that gave an overview of our conversation and add in some intro/outro music. I was fortunate enough to receive permission to use a song that my roommate's brother produced. This allowed me to use a song I really enjoyed while promoting an up-and-coming producer. After I had the completed file, I would upload it to Anchor, which distributed it across 10+ podcast platforms, including Spotify and Apple.

Before I interviewed any guests, I had to develop a brand and image that would fit the podcast and its goal. I was deciding between the names "Through the Point" and "Throw Javelin." After speaking with my teammates, it became clear that I should proceed with *Through the Point*. The name refers to a common coaching cue where they tell the athlete to throw "through the point," which simply means applying the force through the end of the javelin. It is very recognizable and something that would stand out to javelin throwers. After I created the name, I then had to make a logo and description to attract listeners.

For the logo, I wanted to keep it simple and recognizable. Podcast logos are shown as the album cover for each episode. However, I also wanted it to be possible for someone to recognize it when coming across it in another way. While the name *Through the Point* would be easily identifiable as a javelin term to any javelin thrower, this may not be the case for someone who has never thrown. Because of this, I wanted to include an image of a javelin in the logo to help them understand and associate the name with the sport.



Figure 1: *Through the Point* Logo

I also had two taglines that I regularly used in the podcasts' descriptions and my Instagram page's biography. I kept it brief but said "promoting javelin throughout the United States and the world" as well as "the world's #1 (and only) javelin-specific podcast". The first message concisely communicated the goal of the podcast, while the second was humorous yet factual. I explained each episode's goal while also having a memorable tagline that created a sense of rarity and uniqueness for my show. This, combined with the logo, would stand out to my target audience and anyone interested in the javelin.

### **Preparation and Planning**

Now that I had established a look and a theme for my podcast, I began reaching out to potential guests. Before creating the podcast, I had a personal javelin training page on Instagram. Because of this, I had a foot in the door of the javelin community and was not a stranger to potential guests and listeners. The page had around 700 followers at the time, so it is not like I had celebrity status. However, it did build some credibility that I was passionate about the sport as well. I contacted all of my guests through the direct messages feature on Instagram. Even as the operation continued, this seemed to be the best way to reach them because Instagram is by far the most popular social media platform for javelin. I made sure to emphasize that this project was to grow the sport that most everyone involved supports. I have had only one person out of the 40+ people I have interviewed not respond to this day. The willingness to participate and contribute from the community was remarkable and eliminated basically any issue I could have had with getting exciting guests.

One thing worth noting is the growth that my Instagram account had throughout this time. I will discuss more specifics in future sections about listener data and the like, but I will keep it simple. I had a goal to post at least one piece of content on my Instagram page every day to promote awareness for the brand. This included javelin videos, results, photos, memes, etc., to spread entertaining and helpful content to the community. The growth was quite linear, and at the time of writing this, I am at around 6,800 followers with only 400 following. The follower-to-following ratio shows that these followers came organically and did not just follow me because I followed them first. It is essential to include this information about my Instagram because its size allowed me to get my foot in the door with many top throwers. I would post videos of some of the best in the world and tag them each time I did so they would see the content I was putting out. If I had only posted when a podcast was released, I do not believe this page would have been nearly as

successful. However, because I immersed myself in the community, I became a page with a podcast instead of just a podcast page that announced episodes for personal gain.

Considering I have completed many interviews, it would not make sense to discuss each podcast episode's contents within the paper. However, I will go into details over the first group of guests I reached out to while planning and then highlighting others later. What is nice the guests can be grouped together through experience as either elite/Olympic throwers, college throwers, etc. This will be covered in more detail as they come up.

### Show Time

The following table shows the first eight guests I scheduled for the podcast.

Table 1. *Through the Point* Initially Scheduled Episode List

<b>Guest</b>	<b>About</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Link</b>
Kevin Foster	Found of Javelin Anatomy	2/7/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/r6dpssch">https://tinyurl.com/r6dpssch</a>
Liam Christensen	Got javelin as high school event in SC	2/15/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/jbz zz4fn">https://tinyurl.com/jbz zz4fn</a>
Erick Friedman	Owens Javelin Brand	3/11/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/mhzfdb9c">https://tinyurl.com/mhzfdb9c</a>
Kara Winger	US Record Holder	3/18/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/kvtjb4a2">https://tinyurl.com/kvtjb4a2</a>
Capers Williamson	2018 US #1	3/28/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/3ms67hhv">https://tinyurl.com/3ms67hhv</a>
Grant Fisher and Liam Kahn	Baseball Players Turned Javelin	4/3/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/xmdau37x">https://tinyurl.com/xmdau37x</a>
Michael Shuey	US #1 Male	4/12/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/rvyjb4u6">https://tinyurl.com/rvyjb4u6</a>
Ariana Ince	US #2 Female	4/26/2020	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/c62snv3r">https://tinyurl.com/c62snv3r</a>

Kevin Foster was a good friend of mine and someone easy to schedule. I felt that having the first guest be someone I was familiar with would help create a successful first episode and get some of the nerves out of the way. Kevin was a vital guest because he is the owner of the Instagram account/brand *Javelin Anatomy*. At the time of recording, the page had around 11,000 followers, so it would provide a significant promotion opportunity to get my name out there and receive some listens. To some in the javelin community, Kevin is also somewhat of a black sheep. Some of his methods and teachings break conventional javelin coaching norms, and he has received some backlash because of it. For this interview and all of the interviews, it was my goal to avoid going too far into the event's technicalities and focus primarily on their motivation for throwing/pursuing a career in the javelin. I felt that this gave me the best opportunity to appeal to everyone in the community without ruffling any feathers along the way.

Kevin's interview was an excellent icebreaker for my podcasting skills. I was undoubtedly nervous once it started, but that eased up as time went on. I had to learn the proper timing of asking questions because, at times, I almost overdid the pauses between questions and answers. I ended up editing those out so listeners would not know that it happened. Kevin's story was unique to inspire javelin throwers to take ownership of their careers to see what is possible. He switched from baseball to javelin in the middle of high school and was a solid high school thrower. He ended up walking on at the University of Connecticut. When he first got there, he said he felt incredibly outclassed by the other athletes around him. He said that was a massive wake-up call to start turning his career around. After suffering some injury setbacks, he broke the 70-meter mark, which is seen as the elite NCAA thrower level. Not only was this story personally motivating, but it showed me that there is more behind people, even if you know them. Kevin was a good friend, but

I did not know the full details of his story. This encouraged me to dig deeper into future guests and not be surprised at what comes my way.

My second guest was Liam Christensen, who is a thrower at Stanford University. To throw for Stanford, you obviously have to be a very successful athlete. However, the main reason Liam interested me was his involvement in getting javelin approved as a high school event in his home state of South Carolina. He even made an appearance on NPR while he was in high school, which shows the impact of what he was working towards. Liam was motivated to bring the sport there because, as a middle schooler, he was introduced to it randomly at a club track practice. However, as he got to high school, it was not a sanctioned event, so he could only compete at club competitions in the summer. The Mount Pleasant Track Club, where he used to compete and now coaches, has grown in massive size due to his efforts to grow the sport. He was clearly an intelligent guest and spoke well while also sharing the same mission in promoting the sport.

When looking for guests, I always tried to have some variety in whom I spoke to. Erick Friedman and Kara Winger were no different. Erick is a thrower in his 40s who also created his own brand of javelins. He legitimately manufactures them and sells them as a business which very few people in the world can say. I knew that his passion for the sport would shine through during the interview, and it was fantastic to hear his story. The only problem I encountered is he was doing the interview in his warehouse for the javelin manufacturing, and there appeared to be a large truck backing up in the background. When I went to edit the episode, for about 15 minutes straight, I heard a dinging sound from the vehicle. This was my first encounter with an audio issue and quickly tried to figure out the best course of action. I went to Audacity and used a noise reduction feature to remove much of the noise. It took that out but did decrease the quality of his



audio track overall. That was a great learning experience and something I ended up needing to use with Kara's interview.

Kara is the US Women's record holder and a three-time Olympian. She was the first high-profile athlete I had interviewed, so I was expectedly nervous before getting on the call. Once I got on, however, Kara was an incredibly kind and gracious guest. We spoke for hours, on and off the recording, about her career and how she has gotten to this point. The part that amazed me was her willingness to be involved in this project going forward. She said she loved the concept so much that she would be willing to take it over if I ever decided I wanted to stop doing it (after the school component is done, of course). While I plan to continue recording, I have interviewed her two additional times since then about handling injuries and training during COVID. We have developed a good friendship, and she shares the same mission in growing the sport within the US and the world. The only issue was again some background noise that I could not detect on Zoom. At this point, we were still using our phones as microphones, and there was some type of echo coming through on her track. Fortunately, through my experience with Erick, I could use that noise reduction technique more effectively. My confidence had grown not only as a host but as an editor as well.

My following interview is one that I would say was by far one of the strangest, most challenging, yet great interviews I had throughout this process. Capers Williamson stood out to me because he went from a college football walk on to US #1 male thrower in 2018 pretty rapidly. There is an article online about him with the tagline "I should be in prison or dead" that discusses his recovery from addiction to become a top athlete. I thought telling the story of someone who had used javelin to take them from a tough place to being on Team USA would be incredibly motivational. It certainly was, but the interview did not go as expected. First, I called him on Zoom,

and he answered in his car while driving, which was certainly a first. Eventually, he parked somewhere, and we were able to get the introduction conversation going. He said that he “did not really care about the podcast and wanted just to have a conversation, man” which made me slightly laugh, but I was just unsure what I was getting myself into. In the first few minutes of the interview, he turned one of the questions back onto me and asked me how my training was going, which I did not expect. In the end, it actually ended up being an interview I received much positive feedback from and a good number of listens. Before this interview, all of my episodes had been ones I would say followed my idea of a “conventional” Zoom podcast interview. This one indeed broke those expectations, but it was positive because it taught me to adjust to the person I am interviewing. It was nice that this happened early on so I could make more adjustments as necessary in the future.

The following interview was quite personal to me. I spoke with Liam Kahn and Grant Fisher, simultaneously, who were both friends of mine before the interview. The two did not know each other that well, but we had all transitioned from being college baseball players to javelin throwers within the past two years. This was the first interview I had done that was more than a one-on-one conversation, and it went smoother than expected. Before starting the recording, we decided who would go first to respond to each question which seemed to prevent taking over one another. The group interview was very well received by the audience, with many requests that I do more like that in the future. I have also provided that conversation to former baseball players who have directly messaged me with questions about how to start throwing the javelin. Without going too far into the details, I struggled with the "yips" during my baseball career which, simply put, is "a sudden inability to throw the ball accurately" (Brewster, 2019, para. 2). This led to much mental stress. Being able to discuss similar stories with Grant and Liam after a couple of years had

passed was really beneficial. Our stories' similarities were almost eerie, and I felt it was one of the most valuable interviews I conducted throughout the project. Not only was it good to learn how to conduct a Zoom group interview, but the content is so applicable to many people.

The last of the initially scheduled interviews taught me the importance of connections. After I had gotten Kara Winger to agree to come on, I used her name as a reference to get Michael Shuey. Michael is currently the top male thrower in the US and qualified for the 2019 World Championships in Doha. I sent Michael a message outlining my plan for the podcast and said how Kara had also agreed to come on. I believe he would have done it either way, but it does not hurt to build your credibility through those familiar names. The interview with Michael went very smoothly and ultimately led to a second appearance later on in the project. However, using those connections again, I used Kara's name and Michael's name to get Ariana Ince, the #2 female thrower in the US behind Kara. Ariana and Michael train together at the Elite Athlete Training Center in Chula Vista, California, so I was grateful to Michael for recommending me to Ariana. The community is close-knit, so I could likely have gotten those interviews regardless. However, it was easier because I had built relationships with these individuals. I also believe it speaks to the podcasting medium's value because in a short period, if done well, it feels like you forge a great connection with those with whom you speak.

For the remainder of the interviews, I listened to recommendations from "fans" and monitored what was happening in the off-season. Considering I followed many of these people already, it made it easier for me to get an idea of what was happening within the javelin community and attempt to speak with them. The coolest part of the process was when people would ask me to be interviewed. This let me know that the work I was doing was resonating with the community. One of the most humorous/greatest examples when a male thrower's girlfriend approached me

about having him on the podcast. He is one of the top throwers in the US and is someone I likely would have reached out to but to hear that he was a big enough fan that his girlfriend knew about it was almost surreal. I am leaving his name out of this paper because his girlfriend said not to let him know she suggested it. However, ultimately it was one of my most enjoyable interviews as well. He had such a great story of recovering from injuries, being incredibly successful, working while training full time, and traveling the world to compete. The lesson I learned from this situation is that you never know what you will get from people in these interviews. The guest that you were so excited about getting could be kind of stale, while the one out of nowhere is just amazing.

It would be impossible for me to go into specific details in this paper for all the guests I ended up interviewing. I am grateful for every one of them, and if I do not mention their names, it does not mean I did not value the conversation. Instead, I will highlight certain guests and exciting pieces of information I found from talking with many athletes, coaches, and javelin enthusiasts.

With that being said, the highlight of my interviews was certainly the conversation I had with the German thrower Johannes Vetter. Without being involved in javelin/track and field, it may be hard to appreciate what he did in 2020. Vetter threw 97.76m (320 feet), which was good for the second best throw all-time and shocked the entire javelin community. This throw was less than a meter from the world record, and the javelin record is regarded as one of the most challenging records to break in all of track and field. I commented on a few of Vetter's posts, and he joked about an interview in the future. Eventually, I messaged him on Instagram, and he said he would love to. Besides the world record holder, this is about as big of an interview as one could get in the javelin. The interview ended up being at 8 AM central time, but there was a point in time where it was going to be at 5 AM. I was so ecstatic about the interview that I was willing to do it, although thankfully, it did not happen then. When we got on the Zoom call, to my surprise, he was

just casually eating a sandwich and asked to talk a bit so he could finish his lunch. We then proceeded with the interview, which was outstanding, and after, he continued to talk to me for about 45 minutes. At the conclusion, he said I could reach out to him whenever I needed something. It was great to connect with one of the greatest throwers of all time, and I was impressed by my confidence throughout the interview. At the start, I was nervous about interviewing anyone, including my friends. Through the podcast process, I became confident that I could interview any of my guests successfully.

I interviewed several individuals who have brands/companies within the track and field realm outside of current athletes. What has been remarkable has been the continued contact these individuals have had with me following our talks. I spoke with Carl McCargo from Trackbarn, Tim Brennan from Torch College Recruiting, and Grant Benzel from Memes4Throwers in addition to Erick from Spearwerx, whom I discussed earlier. These people were amazing guests as they were funny, personable, and passionate about the topic at hand. I have not accepted any endorsements as I am still an NCAA athlete. However, these are individuals that I feel would be great to partner with post graduation. The feedback I received from them in that I was able to help their brands gain some recognition and publicity meant the world to me. Growing a small business is hard, so playing even a minor role in that development was rewarding. They have continued to contact me as friends and have regularly shared/promoted their brands on my Instagram page.

All of my interviews provided me with great content on their backgrounds and overall passion for the sport. Seeing the similarities across everyone's stories was one of the most exciting aspects of this process. Nearly everyone said that as a child, that had an indescribable attraction to throwing things. Whether that be a ball, a rock, or another random object, it was so typical for these people to have just enjoyed throwing. Many elite throwers said that they were grateful for

the opportunity to travel to areas of the world that they likely would have never gone without javelin. College throwers appreciated their teammates and the friends they made from the community along the way. Creating a platform to allow these individuals to tell their stories and express their passion is something that I will be forever grateful for. Through this podcast and Instagram page, I established a substantial brand within the javelin community and impacted so many throwers along the way.

### **Listener/Follower Data**

When creating this podcast, I did some research on what else was out there for javelin podcasts. There was nothing. Zero javelin-specific podcast shows existed in the world. So when entering the market, I knew I had a chance for success due to the niche's untapped nature. I posted on the Instagram page at least once a day for about a year and released episodes weekly for a considerable time. The only reason that slowed down was as I got back to campus, I had a busier schedule and began to focus on the development of this paper. My initial episode was released on January 24th, 2020, which I called Episode 0. I did a brief 9-minute introduction on who I was and what the podcast was about. My most recent upload was on February 12th, 2021, so the podcast has spanned over one year. As I mentioned earlier, I used the platform Anchor to distribute the episodes. They were available on Apple, Spotify, Google, Anchor, and others for a total of eight platforms. While it was available on various platforms, 46% listened on Spotify, and 44% listened on Apple. So, 90% of the listens occurred on these platforms—the other six combined for 10% of the listening location.

In total, I have received just over 11,900 listens on my episodes, with an average of around 275 listeners per episode. The most listened to episode was with the German thrower Johannes Vetter which at the time of writing this has 578 listens. The majority of my listeners came from

the United States at 71%. However, to my amazement, the other 29% of listeners were spread across 53 other countries. The second largest was Canada, but even countries like Namibia, Greece, and South Korea appeared in the listener base. Within the US, 44 states were represented, with the top three being Pennsylvania, California, and Illinois. Pennsylvania is one of the dominant states for high school javelin, making sense that they would have a solid listener base. I am a resident of Illinois, so despite not being a state with many javelin throwers, those listens likely came from family and friends. California is also not a high school javelin state. However, it does have a large population and the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center in their state. There were likely many listens from people who knew Michael Shuey and Ariana Ince as both currently train there.

Interestingly, only 49% of my listeners listened on an iPhone or Android, with 51% categorized as "other." Unfortunately, Anchor does not allow me to see the devices that fall under "other," but I would anticipate that includes laptops, computers, Amazon Alexa, etc. This is surprising as 55% of my listeners were between ages 18-27. In the literature review, I found statistics supporting how frequently that age group is listening on their phones. This is undoubtedly a topic that could use future research.

Many of the Instagram insights for followers match up with the ones from the podcast. At the time of writing this, the Through the Point Page has approximately 6,900 followers. The age group, 18-34, makes up the most significant percentage of followers at 64.5%. Both platforms also skewed heavily towards male followers/listeners at approximately 82%. Again, the US came in with the most significant percentage of followers on the Instagram page, with India in second. After looking at these insights, there could be great opportunities to partner with brands in the future because "the "18-to-34 age group has been considered especially valuable to advertisers. It is the biggest cohort, overtaking the baby boomers in 2015, and 18 to 34s are thought to have

money to burn on toys and clothes and products" (Kailath, 2019, para. 2). Although the topic is very niche, it is clear who is listening and following, so having such a targeted audience could bode well for future investment into the brand.

### **Future Work**

I plan to continue working on this podcast past the academic portion's completion, so much of this discussion will be my actual future plans. I believe the implementation of a YouTube channel would be a significant next step. YouTube is such a massive platform that it accounts for 25% of mobile internet traffic (Cullen, 2020). The throwers I interviewed also said how vital YouTube was to their development within the sport. So, not only is the world active on the platform, but the niche also has heavy usage. This could bode well for SEO purposes by using keywords like javelin and elite throwers' names, which are frequently searched for on YouTube. I could post full interviews or shorter, more digestible clips similar to Gary Vaynerchuk, Joe Rogan, and other social media personalities. While I could use much of the same content from the interviews, it would require more time to edit the clips and make intriguing titles/thumbnails to attract users scrolling the platform. Diversifying my platforms could help increase the listener base by exposing more throwers, or potential throwers, to my work.

Another platform that would be worth exploring further is Tik Tok. I did create a Tik Tok page while doing the project, but I did not regularly use it or post content on it. However, the platform fits incredibly well with my audience's demographics and is growing at a rapid pace. In Q1 of 2019, Tik Tok was the most downloaded app in Apple's App Store above platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Mohsin, 2021). Also, 50.3% of adult users on the platform are between the ages of 18 and 34 ("Tik Tok: How fast is it growing", 2019). The growth and popularity of Tik Tok make it an intriguing place to create content. The platform's viral nature



gives me a chance to, with the consistent posting of quality content, be exposed to a massive audience that is not possible at the same level on any other platform.

Utilizing the visual nature of Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok together would be an effective strategy for future growth. YouTube would likely be a better avenue to reach people already interested in the event. At the same time, Tik Tok would have the chance to expose javelin to unfamiliar people. While I would like to think that the public would love to see javelin throwing, I acknowledge that it may not receive the admiration from non-throwers that I would hope for. Because of this, I believe a YouTube channel should take precedence over a Tik Tok page in a time-sensitive scenario. However, the two can work as complements and not substitutes, so it will be worth experimenting with both in the future.

## CHAPTER 4. REFLECTIONS

Since I began throwing the javelin in 2018, I have been running a personal training page on Instagram that tracked my progress. I went from being a baseball player my entire life to picking up track and field for the first time as a junior in college. I was having a rough time with baseball and struggling with anxiety that completely hindered my ability to play. I was ultimately let go from the team and had a decision to make. I had seen some articles about baseball players throwing the javelin and ultimately decided to give it a shot with no prior experience. When many people would have likely given up on their athletic careers, I decided to follow a new one. On my page, I have received countless messages from baseball players in similar situations who have some interest in the javelin but have no idea where to start.

With this podcast, I was hoping to inspire people like the ones who were messaging me to take a chance and see what it can do for you. I went from being a Division III relief pitcher to earning a Division I scholarship within a single calendar year. While results will undoubtedly vary, it is the experiences along the way that have made it so rewarding. My passion for athletics has come back, and I have met many amazing people. I understand that not every episode will profoundly impact each listener. However, the large quantity allows people to pick and choose the ones that sound the most interesting to them. By selecting throwers from all different backgrounds, I believe I created a diverse set of stories that can motivate and inspire those interested in the sport.

Throughout 40+ interviews, I heard many different stories of how the javelin has changed, benefitted, and enriched the lives of those involved. The first significant commonality among all was the people and the community. Track, and javelin specifically, has a community unlike any other that I have experienced. This is the only sport where I have seen the fierce competition, yet your opponent still cheers for you when you are throwing. This was echoed by many of those I spoke to. They felt that having that support for one another made it incredibly enjoyable. When

you compete in a more obscure sport, you are in mutual respect and hope to grow it together. Multiple guests used the term "fraternity" to describe the intimate nature of those participating in the event. The teammates, coaches, and opponents along the way are a significant reason why at all levels, these individuals choose to participate in a sport that gives next to no monetary reward.

Next, the opportunity for travel was something that my guests enjoyed, most specifically at the highest skill levels. Ariana Ince told a hilarious story about her first international competition being in Africa. She had just days to prepare everything to fly out there, which is certainly uncommon for a trip to somewhere that far away. When she started competing, the events' measuring systems were entirely off, and people were producing insane results. A few days later, those results were determined to be incorrect, and the meet as a whole was voided. So in her first international competition, her results did not count. However, she mentioned how the opportunity to travel to Africa would never have happened for her without javelin. A few years ago, Michael Shuey, who graduated from Penn State, traveled to Doha in 2019 to compete in the World Championships. On a smaller scale, athletes like former Rutgers thrower and four-time All-American Chris Mirabelli have traveled all over the United States to throw. Someone who plays in the NFL would receive much higher pay but be confined primarily to playing games within US cities. While these elite javelin throwers are not compensated at the same level, they all spoke highly of the international experiences they have been afforded due to their participation.

Finally, all of the throwers I spoke to had an indescribable attraction to the act of throwing. I briefly described this earlier, but it was truly remarkable how so many people described the same feeling. Regardless of their sports background, they mentioned that they were always attracted to throwing activities when they were younger. Whether it was just skipping rocks or more traditional forms such as baseball, the enjoyment of throwing was always a commonality. I was the same way

growing up, so it was very relatable to hear their stories and see their eyes light up when talking about it.

On a personal note, my interview and general speaking skills improved significantly during this process. In the beginning, there were some long pauses between questions and nerves about messing up. I also relied too heavily on following my question sheet precisely as I prepared it. As time went on, I realized the best way to conduct the interviews is to use the sheet as a guide and ask follow-up questions on the topics they seemed most passionate about. My confidence grew considerably. I no longer felt nervous conducting the interviews and felt I could confidently orchestrate an engaging conversation. This skill has already carried over to several class presentations/discussions where I have felt entirely comfortable talking in front of a group. My communication skills have certainly been refined since I began working on this project.

I am fully committed to continuing *Through the Point* once my creative component is completed. The generosity, kindness, and relationships I have built through this work are something I would not trade for the world. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to impact as many people as possible, as it has been even more fun for me. While the chance to monetize this project is undoubtedly a plus, I would continue doing it even without that. My appreciation for the sport and everyone involved in it has grown immensely. Being able to share that passion with others is truly a blessing.

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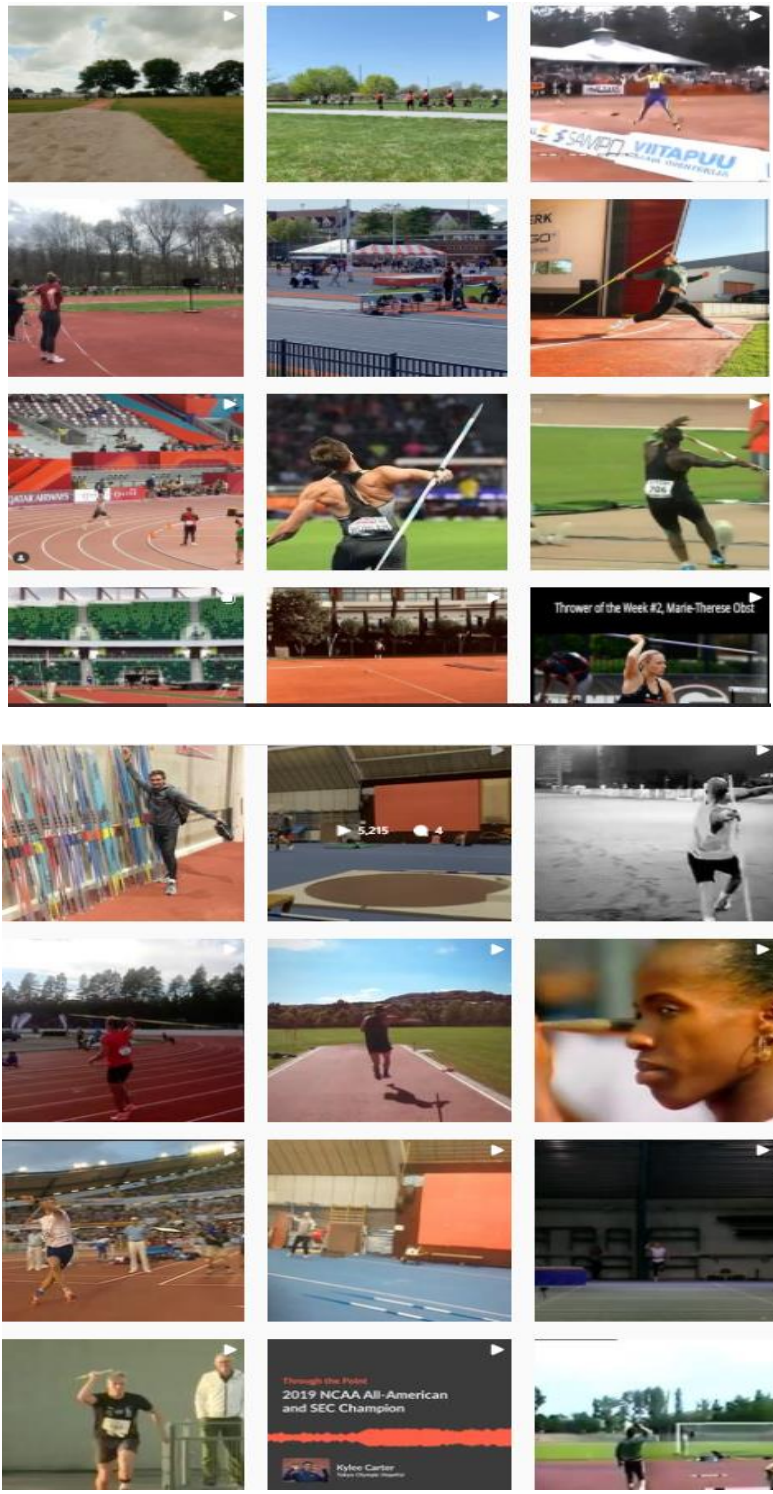
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### APPENDIX A. Screenshots of Instagram Posts





**APPENDIX B. Full List of Interviews**

1. Episode 0: Who I am and How the Podcast Came to Be
2. Episode 1: Kevin Foster
3. Episode 2: Liam Christensen
4. Episode 3: Erick Friedman aka Spearwerx
5. Episode 4: Kara Winger
6. Episode 5: Capers Williamson
7. Episode 6: Transitioning from Baseball to Javelin with Grant Fisher and Liam Kahn
8. Episode 7: 2019 US #1 Michael Shuey
9. Episode 8: Tim Glover
10. Episode 9: Ariana Ince
11. Episode 10: Jeff Gorski
12. Episode 11: Gavin Johnson Assoon
13. Episode 12: 2008 Olympian Mike Hazle
14. Episode 13: The Javelin Man aka Ron Johnson
15. Episode 14: 4x All-American Chris Mirabelli
16. Episode 15: Quarantine Training with Shelton Sainvil, Chris Fredericks, and Dan Labbadia
17. Episode 16: Overcoming Injuries with University of Minnesota Thrower Hailey Poole
18. Episode 17: Track Barn CEO and Founder Carl McCargo
19. Episode 18: Grant Benzel aka Memes 4 Throwers
20. Episode 19: 2x Olympian Sean Furey
21. Episode 20: Post-Collegiate Tips with Kara Winger and Ariana Ince
22. Episode 21: 2x Swedish Olympian Kim Amb

23. Episode 22: Life of a Masters Thrower with Joseph Greenberg and Michael Her
24. Episode 23: 3x World Championship Qualifier Riley Dolezal
25. Episode 24: The OFFICIAL Retirement of 2x Olympian Cyrus Hostetler
26. Episode 25: Coaching and Being a National Champion with Andrew Bloom and Eloise Cappellano
27. Episode 26: Norwegian Olympic Hopeful Sigrid Borge
28. Episode 27: #1 Scottish Thrower Greg Millar
29. Episode 28: College Recruiting with Torch College Recruiting Founder Tim Brennan
30. Episode 29: Where Did Javelin World Go? With Kyler Osborne
31. Episode 30: NCAA III National Record Holder Tim VanLiew
32. Episode 31: 2019 World Championship Silver-Medalist Magnus Kirt
33. Episode 32: Division I All-Americans Sindri Gudmundsson and Jesse Newman
34. Episode 33: World #1 Johannes Vetter
35. Episode 34: University of Oregon Throwers Ty Hampton and Dalton Rasmussen
36. Episode 35: Injury Advice and Personal Life with Kara Winger
37. Episode 36: Tom Pukstys
38. Episode 37: U23 Irish Record Holder Stephen Rice
39. Episode 38: Entrepreneur and 2x French National Champion Decathlete Alex Folacci
40. Episode 39: Team Denmark Athletes and Javelin Society Founders Sebastian Risgaard and Sebastian Skovhauge
41. Episode 40: 2019 NCAA Runner Up and SEC Champion Kylee Carter
42. Episode 41: German Athlete and Social Media Marketer
43. Episode 42: Catching Up with 2019 USA #1 Michael Shuey

44. Episode 43: 2x NCAA DII Champion Nick Howe

45. Thrower of the Week #1, Donovan Banks of McNeese State University

46. Thrower of the Week #2, Marie-Therese Obst of University of Georgia