



WILLIAM E. SIMON OLYMPIC ENDOWMENT
Shannon Pohl Update

Dear Board of Trustees for the William E. Simon Olympic Endowment for the Support of Athletes,

This year has truly been the most exciting year in my badminton career, and I have all of you to thank. After I received notification that I was a recipient of the William E. Simon Olympic Endowment on February first, needless to say I was beyond ecstatic. I was so excited I could barely sleep! I felt so honored and lucky to be selected from amongst so many talented athletes, and I was so happy that a badminton player was chosen! I immediately started planning my move to Denmark to train at the International Badminton Academy. While I planned my big move, I was competing in both local tournaments to get some practice, and international qualifying tournaments for the 2006 World Championships. I continued to do temporary work around the Chicagoland area when I was between tournaments, and save money. I was also giving talks about badminton, and fund-raising in my community.

With just over a week to go before I departed for Denmark, I was still trying to figure out how I was going to sustain myself for a good length of time in Copenhagen-- one of the world's most pricey cities. I suddenly had an idea--to plan a huge fundraiser/going away party! In a week's time, my family and I planned the entire thing. A bar in Chicago gave me a private room to host the party at, along with an unbeatable deal where half the bar's earnings from the party would go to my training fund. I went door to door in the business sector of my home town, Arlington Heights, asking for donations for a raffle to help my cause. I was overwhelmed by the response! Boutique's, fitness centers, salon's, bars, restaurants and cafés (including Starbuck's Coffee and California Pizza Kitchen) all donated gift certificates and prizes for the raffle! Furthermore, my sponsor, Wilson Sporting Goods, donated hundreds of dollars worth of equipment for the raffle. We also did a 50/50 raffle. A great Chicago band even volunteered to play

Giving a speech at the Son's of the American Legion State Conference.



The International Badminton Academy out to dinner.

at the party for free! My mother and I cooked all the food for the party, and my family invited everyone we knew! It was a huge success! Everyone had a great evening, most people in attendance won a raffle prize, and in the end I managed to raise nearly \$4,000 for my training and tournament fund!

In May, I moved to the Copenhagen area to train at the International Badminton Academy (IBA) with some of the best players and coaches in the world. I can not even begin to tell you what an amazing experience it is to be training with Olympians from around the world. It is so motivational to be working with such a diverse group of dedicated athletes (see group photo on the cover). We come from all over the world, from 5 continents, but we all have one common goal--to become better badminton players! We have all become close friends and encourage each other all the time! It is so thrilling to have all these top players to spar with--it's quite the change from when I was in Chicago and the only Midwesterner competing internationally in badminton!

The coaches at this academy are some of the top coaches in the world, and I am learning new things all the time. Denmark has a long tradition as being one of the top countries for badminton, and the Danes are incredibly knowledgeable. The strength of the Danish coaching is in technique and tactics. This is so useful to me, because with limited badminton coaches in the U.S., I have never had the opportunity to learn many of the proper techniques and footwork. I have come very far in my badminton career by a strong work ethic and a "never say die attitude", but I know that this huge focus on learning the proper technique is going to catapult my career and help me achieve my dream of making the 2008 Olympic Team. Furthermore, the large emphasis on tactics in practice is extremely helpful. If you play a player with a similar ability, the one with the best tactics will ultimately prevail! We have on court training during the week for two hours a day. We



Practicing footwork at the IBA.



Monday morning multi-shuttle training at the IBA.

also have additional track practices, mental training, video analysis, and weight training. They even have an electronic shuttle feeder (see photo on the cover)! This is one of the few of its kind in the world and is great for spending long hours practicing technique.

Another wonderful aspect of training in Denmark is that the coaches speak perfect English. In the U.S., many of my coaches had recently immigrated from Asia (another badminton powerhouse) and sometimes struggled with the English language. Some of the finer technical details of strokes were often lost in translation in my previous years training. I now know I am getting all the fine details and I really believe these details are bringing my game to a whole new level. Many of these details are how to make strokes more deceptive. Of course, habits have developed over time in my game, and it has taken some time to break them! Learning how to hit a drop shot, for example, in an entirely different way, takes some getting used to. You have to get worse, before you can get better. In the end though, there is no greater feeling than when a new stroke is finally starting to click and suddenly you are beating all your opponents with it!

Badminton is extremely popular in Denmark. Top Danish players are household names. The small country in Denmark has around 500 registered badminton clubs and over 110,000 registered players. This is another huge benefit to living in Denmark. I am now playing 1st singles and 1st doubles for Gledsaxe Søborg Badmintonklub. I get around \$2,000 to

play for them which I can use towards my academy training fee and my tournaments. It's so exciting to be part of a team environment. Everyone is rooting for one another, and large crowds come out to watch the team matches in Denmark! I have training with this team an additional three times a week for three hours. These team matches are great practice and the level is extremely high.

A great thing about being the top female player at my Danish club is that they pay for all my entries to Danish Tournaments! This is great for extra match play experience. I recently played my first Danish Tournament and I was runner up in singles.

I competed in 12 international tournaments so far this year. The toughest tournaments of the year, were the Swiss Open, the German Open, and the All England Open. These are some of the most prestigious grand prix tournaments and I played them to gain experience against some of the top ranked players in the World! Although I lost in the qualifying of all three events, I had the pleasure of playing against a two-time Olympic Silver Medalist and testing my skills against the best! My best performance of the year was a bronze medal in women's singles at the Southern Pan Am International in Miami, Florida. I am also happy with my recent Round of 16 finish at the Polish Open. In the end of the World Championship qualifying period, I was thrilled to have succeeded in achieving my goal of qualifying for the 2006 World Championships in women's singles!

Discussing tactics between games with my IBA coach, Michael Kjeldsen at the 2006 World Championships in Madrid, Spain.



This was my second time in a row to qualify for the Worlds, and I was the only American singles player, male or female to qualify this year. I had a difficult first round match, and ended up losing to the Netherlands in the Round of 64. Although I was disappointed with my loss after my exciting top-32 finish last year, I am confident that my game is miles ahead of where it was last year and I can not begin to describe what an amazing experience it is to represent the U.S.A. in the World Championships. Competing in these events are really great experiences in dealing with pressure, nerves, crowds, large stadiums, drafts, etc. It is also tons of fun! I know this experience will help me gain confidence in the future at similar types events.

In the beginning of my stay in Denmark I had the pleasure of living with the Danish National Technique Coach and his family. They welcomed me into their home and helped me get on my feet. Next, while I continued my job hunt, I spent a month living in a house with other international badminton athletes. This was great fun and an ideal situation, but the rent was too much for me to afford.

With my training schedule keeping me busy in the mornings and evenings, and my busy tournament schedule, I wasn't able to find any graphic design jobs or office jobs that would give me the flexibility I needed. I had to look outside the box. That is when I started considering a job as an au pair for a family that needed help in the afternoons. After searching long and hard, I finally found a job as an Au pair that worked with my training and tournament schedules. I would be living with a German family, taking care of their 10 year old boy, and helping out around the house. The boy was in school during my morning sessions and the parents were home in time for my evening sessions. I receive \$477 dollars a month plus room and board. I have to commute an hour and a half to practice at the Academy before dawn and the same time back again, taking every type of transportation from walking, to the metro, to the train, and to the bus! It's a

My doubles partner, Samantha Jinadasa, and I with our fans at the World Championships!



With Danish National Technique Coach, Liang Ying Zang and his daughter in Copenhagen.

long haul, but it is totally worth it to me to be able to pursue my badminton dreams.

The job didn't turn out to be quite what I had expected. In order to make up for time off for tournaments, I found myself working around the clock to the point of absolute exhaustion. Actually, the job ended up being a nightmare. It was much more about intense cleaning than about being a nanny, and the additional 3-5 hours a day of physical labor was really more than I could handle with my 3-5 hours of training a day. I was working my fingers to the bone, the workload never ceased, and my wages only covered basic necessities such as my transportation pass and my phone. I've been spending my days washing floors and scrubbing toilets to keep playing badminton!

Unfortunately (but maybe for the best), I lost my job this week. My badminton schedule was just too demanding for the family, and their cleaning schedule was just too demanding for me. I have done everything I can possibly think of to extend my time in Denmark, but I have now exhausted all funding from all sources and gone into considerable debt. However, I'm absolutely not willing to give up yet, as I am confident that the training I can receive here in Denmark, coupled with my club team matches and tournaments are exactly what I need to take me to the next level, and to achieve my goal of making the 2008 Olympic Team. I am currently the second highest ranked American in women's singles in the world with a ranking of #102. I am well on my way to making the next World Championships and Pan Am Games if I can find new sources of funding. I believe I can do quite well at the Pan Am Games if I can get there! I am determined to find a way to continue my passion for badminton the next year and a half, on the road to Beijing. It won't be easy, but I will be actively searching for a job and an apartment in the coming month, and continuing

my ongoing pursuit of new sponsors. I am also looking into taking out a large loan, although going into more debt is quite frightening.

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping me to become a better badminton player. Coming to Denmark to train has been a dream come true for me, and it wouldn't have been possible without the William E. Simon Olympic Endowment. I am amazed every day at how much I can still learn about the sport of badminton! I feel I have found the perfect place to train and that I am several steps closer to my goals. Despite my financial woes and my difficulties finding employment, I want you to know that these past nine months have been such an enjoyable experience and I feel so fortunate to have been given this unique and incredible opportunity. The excitement I feel each day when I step onto the court at training makes it all worth it. Thank you so very much.

Sincerely,

Shannon Pohl

Shannon Pohl

P.S. You can keep track of my progress at www.shannonpohl.com



Having fun in the kid's play area at the 2006 World Championships!



My match vs. the Netherlands at the 2006 World Championships!

