

# Lacey educator bound for Athens Paralympics

## Teacher doubles as head coach for U.S. team, local athlete Jeff Skiba

BY LISA PEMBERTON  
THE OLYMPIAN

Chinook Middle School teacher Bryan Hoddle tries to inspire students in his social studies classes the same way he motivates world-class athletes. He believes that school, sports and life in general are all about "the big five" — vision, focus, persistence, discipline and commitment.

Hoddle, 45, of Tumwater will leave in about two weeks for Athens, Greece, where he'll serve as the head coach of the U.S. Paralympic Track and Field team.

Among the team's 42 athletes are amputees and people with blindness, cerebral palsy, dwarfism and conditions that require use of a wheelchair.

The Paralympic Games will begin Sept. 17 and will feature more than 4,000 athletes from about 140 countries.

Hoddle will be at Chinook for the first day of school Wednesday.

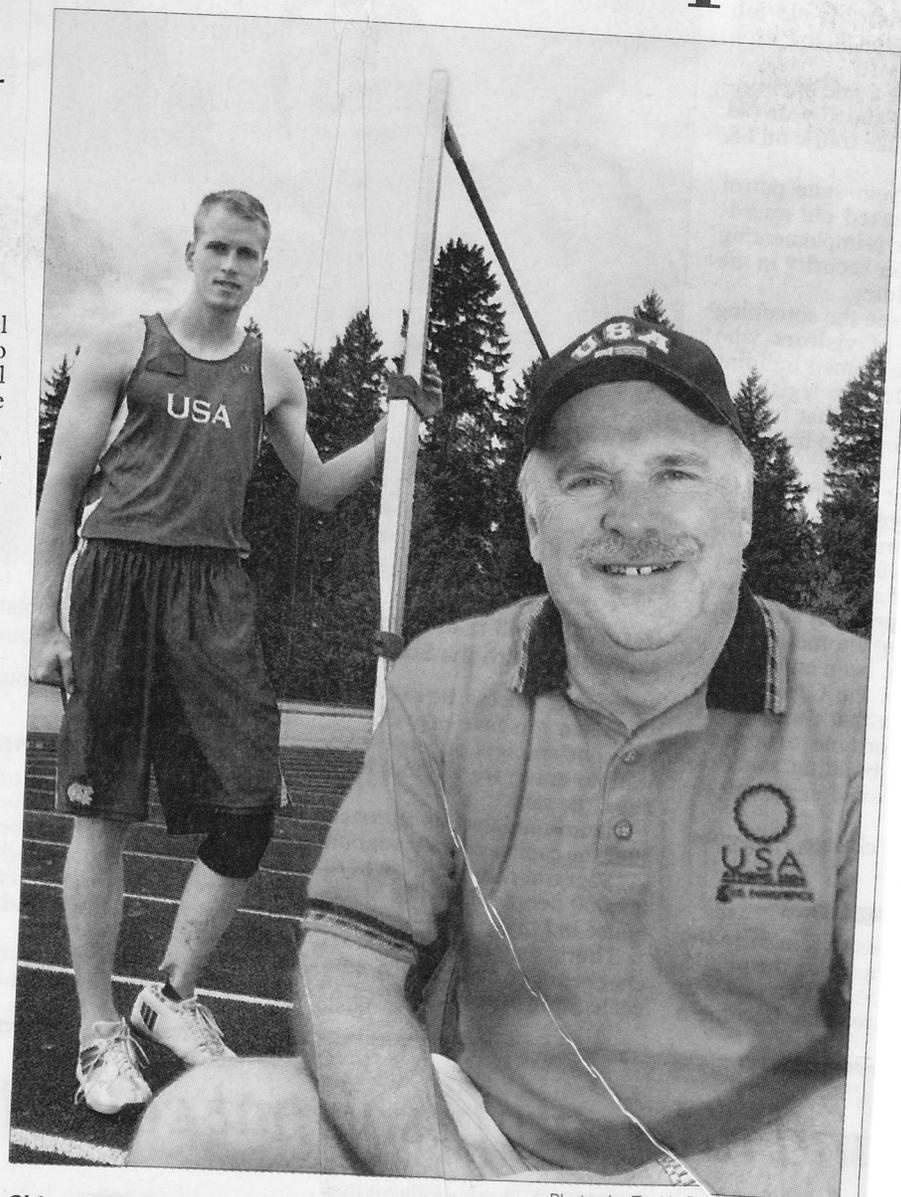
He's scheduled to catch a plane the following day to Washington, D.C., where he'll meet up with his team, which includes wheelchair racer Jacob Hival of Seattle and high-jumper, discus and javelin thrower Jeff Skiba of Lacey. From Washington, D.C., the team is scheduled to fly to Athens on Sept. 11, where they'll have a few days of training before opening ceremonies.

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Hoddle began coaching disabled athletes about 10 years ago.

His first client was Tony Volpentest of Mountlake Terrace, a sprinter born without hands or feet who won two gold medals during Atlanta's Paralympic Games in 1996.

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Photos by Toni L. Bail, the Olympian

Chinook Middle School teacher Bryan Hoddle (right) has been training with para-athlete Jeff Skiba for two years. In September, they'll travel to Athens, where Skiba, 20, will compete and Hoddle will act as head coach of the 42-member U.S. Paralympic Track and Field Team. BELOW: Skiba tries to clear 6 feet 5 inches in the high jump during practice Friday at River Ridge High school.



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## CLASSROOM

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"I always wanted to be a teacher," he said.

Hoddle's "sports career" was launched when he was a fifth-grader at Mountain View Elementary, when he won a run-off against kids from other elementary schools.

"Somebody said, 'Hey you can run fast,'" Hoddle said. "And now I'm going to Athens. How funny is that?"

He went on to join the Thurston County Striders community track team and also ran for his school track teams at Chinook and at North Thurston High School.

In 1977, Hoddle won the high school state championship for the 400-meter run.

He ran for a year at Eastern Washington University.

"My career kind of got cut short with some knee problems," Hoddle said.

But three years later, he began teaching and coaching.

### Building a program

In the early 1980s, Hoddle took over a middle school track program of 48 students and built the program to more than 300 student athletes in three years. He's

## On the Web

More information about the Paralympic Games is available at [www.athens2004.com](http://www.athens2004.com), and [www.paralympic.org](http://www.paralympic.org).

the assistant track coach at River Ridge High School and specializes in helping students with sprints and hurdles.

He also privately coaches Skiba, the high-jump world record holder for disabled athletes.

Hoddle said coaching and teaching are very similar.

"I always say in sports, you're using sports to help the student athlete develop things that they're going to use later in life," he said.

He likes to decorate his classroom with motivational phrases and often shares his Paralympics and other track experiences with his students.

River Ridge sophomore Adam Owada took three of Hoddle's classes — U.S. history, leadership, and sports and society.

He said Hoddle was an effective teacher.

"One of the things that lasted with me was that he taught me just to try hard and be the best that I could be — even in my weaker subjects," Owada said.