Olympic dream comes true
Retired hammer thrower is now coach for U.S. team
By KIMBERLY WETZEL
Chronicle Staff Writer

‘We have athletes who are ranking in the top five in the world. They’re looking great. They’re in great shape. I’m planning on some medals. It’s very exciting.’
Bonnie Edmondson

COVENTRY — A Coventry native and two-time national champion in the women’s hammer throw is having part of her dream come true.
She’s going to be part of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics — though not as an athlete, as she had always pictured.

Instead, she will help coach a dozen U.S. Women’s Track and Field throwing event athletes.

Bonnie Edmondson, 52, would have qualified for the track and field hammer competition for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona.

However, she said it was a bit disappointing since there was no event for her to compete in.

The furthest they allowed hammer throwers at that time were the Olympic trials, where she came in third.

And while she always dreamed of competing in the Olympics, she will at least get an Olympic experience and may possibly play a role in helping someone else’s dreams come true.

She arrived in Brazil Tuesday.

“Actually, as a kid I always dreams of becoming an Olympian,” Edmondson said before departing. “You know I did make the team in 1992, but there wasn’t an event to go to. Although I’m not actually competing, I am hopefully playing a very positive role in helping others to achieve their dreams.”

Edmondson grew up in Coventry, and her family still owns Edmondson’s Farm and Nursery on Boston Turnpike, which has been family owned and operated since 1932.

She lived in Hebron and Manchester before moving back to Coventry, where she currently resides.

Edmondson said the fact she’ll be coaching in the Olympics is surreal.

She was selected through a rigorous process to coach athletes in the throwing events and will be responsible for coaching members of the U.S. team who will be competing in the hammer throw, shot put, discus and javelin.

As for the hammer, it really doesn’t resemble the hammer one uses when pounding nails. Rather, the hammer — one of the more traditional Olympic throwing events — is a heavy ball attached to a long chain.

Edmondson said she is optimistic the U.S. will be taking home some medals and she will be proud to have played a role in that process.

Edmondson said the track and field events will start Friday, Aug. 12, even though opening ceremonies are this Friday. Closing ceremonies are Aug. 21.

Meanwhile, she said she expects some Americans to medal.

“We have athletes who are ranked in the top five in the world,” Edmondson said. “They’re looking great. They’re in great shape. I’m planning on some medals. It’s incredibly exciting.”
“We have some of the best throwers in the world, and what’s exciting about the Olympics is anything can happen,” she said.

To be selected as a coach for the Olympics requires a stringent and “very competitive” process, Edmondson said.

She said it is also based on previous coaching experience and the success of those athletes, such as coaching national teams.

She said “a lot of weight” comes down to recommendations from athletes on the team.

“I feel very honored to have been selected because I do know it’s a rigorous process,” Edmondson said.

Edmondson comes with years of experience, starting off as a thrower in track and field when she was in high school, continuing through her collegiate years at Eastern Connecticut State University and then going on to become a professional hammer thrower.

She retired as a professional athlete in 1997.

Edmondson was then asked to become the Olympic development coordinator through the U.S. track and field organization for the women’s hammer throw.

She is still active in coaching students, spending the last five years coaching the men’s and women’s throwing events at Trinity College in Hartford.

However, by day, she is currently program manager at the state Department of Education for school health programs.

While in Rio, Edmondson said she plans on working closely with the men’s track and field throwing coach, since they are “all one team” and are all “working together.”

She said track and field competitors will train at a naval base outside of Rio — which is about an hour ride each way.

As a coach, she will be responsible for getting the transportation and for having everyone where they need to be at the right time.

“One of our jobs is to anticipate what the needs are going to be and heed off any issues that may come up,” she said.

Currently, Edmondson, other coaches and some athletes are “acclimating to what (Olympic) Village life is like,” although she said not all of her athletes have arrived.

She will be working with the athletes — many who are coming with their own personal coaches as well — the entire time she is in Rio, making sure they have what they need to do their very best.

“This is the pinnacle of peoples’ careers,” Edmondson said. “Really, this is what athletes and coaches shoot for. This is their ultimate goal. And gosh, it would be nice to have the opportunity to sightsee, but that’s not what we’re here for.”
Edmondson just finished spending the latter part of July at a training camp at Prairie View A& M University in Texas with the athletes, preparing the team for the Olympics in a venue without any “external distractions.”

She said many of the athletes from all of the track and field events, including, running, jumping and throwing, came to training camp with their personal coaches, and worked on their technique and strength training.

“It’s just a really nice environment for them to come and stay focused on what they need to do,” Edmondson said, while at the training camp.

“This is a fabulous place to be,” Edmondson said of Prairie View. “The facilities are first rate and hospitality is really welcoming and warm. It’s a nice place to prep for something as intense as the Olympics.”

And while Edmondson said she has received some press, including segments on “Better Connecticut,” Channel 3 and Channel 30, she said track and field throwers aren’t the “spectacle of track meets.”

Edmondson said so many people were watching for the throwing events at the trials and none of those events were televised.

“Most often, throwing events are not what you call a prime-time showcase, if you will, on TV,” Edmondson said.

However, she said the athletes are “incredibly appreciative for anything you do for them.”

“If you pay attention and you recognize the athletes in the event, they’re just so genuine and appreciative,” she said.

She said it takes an “incredible athlete” to compete in the throwing events, since you need “speed, strength and agility and to learn a technique certainly takes years to really master.”