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KIP SIMONS
OHIO STATE U.

Miller says team medals are at the top of her wish list, but she admits she does have a bit of a golden eye. "That would be the ultimate," she says. "Right now I'm just thinking about making the team. The gold medal is my long-range goal."

For Ohio State U. gymnast Kip Simons, making the Olympic team would fit nicely into his theory of destiny. Simons, 23, says his parents actually named him after Kenyan

runner Kip Keino. Keino ran to glory in the 1972 Olympics and pioneered training in high altitudes to attain peak performances.

"It goes along with the whole Olympic spirit," Simons says. As a member of the past two U.S. World Championship teams, he already has seen his Olympic dream postponed twice.

"I can remember '88 rolling around and everybody saying that would be my year," Simons recalls. "Then '92 rolled around and I thought that would be

my year. I never would've guessed I'd be 23 and still trying to make it. That's considered an old man!"

Simons, whose college eligibility ran out last season, has his sights set on the Olympic trials in June.

"Just that word gives me a bone-chilling feeling inside," he confesses. "It's something I've worked at for 17 years, and it's going to come down to one competition. It's huge."

"I've already made two World Championship teams, so in some respects I could rest, but it's just not as big as the Olympics. It's just not the same if you don't make that Olympic team."

According to gymnast and 1992 Olympic bronze medalist Dominique Dawes, Simons has the right idea.

"I would just say to take it one day at a time and try not to lose focus," says Dawes, who is now an 18-year-old freshman at the U. of Maryland.

Dawes, who earned a team medal in '92, says her goal for '96 is to capture some individual hardware.

"My tricks are more difficult than they were in '92, and I'm working on being a lot more confident going into competitions," she says.

Diamond hope

Another star who isn't worried about high expectations is Stanford U. baseball player A.J. Hinch, considered by many to be the premier catcher in the nation. Hinch, who became the first player in history to spend five years with the USA national team, is as close to a lock to make the squad as you can get.

"It adds some motivation, and it challenges me," says Hinch. He was among 60 players invited to the fall Olympic tryouts. "If anything, it makes me a better player, and I want to be a better player."

Hinch was selected by the Minnesota Twins in the third round of the 1995 June amateur draft, but he opted to return to school. He says the opportunity to compete in the Olympics was a major factor in his decision not to turn pro.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing," Hinch says. "It will be a special feeling and quite an honor."

One man Hinch may be flashing signs for is U. of Tennessee pitching ace, R.A. Dickey. The junior right-hander remembers the time he realized he wasn't like other kids.

"I had never really pitched much, but I always had a pretty good arm," Dickey says. "One day when I was probably 8 or 9 years old, I started pitching, and to be honest, nobody could hit it. From then on, I was a pitcher. I enjoy doing it. I like having that much control over a ball game."

Last summer, Dickey recorded a 1.94 ERA while logging more innings (46.1) than anyone else on the Team USA pitching staff.

Rebuilding the South

When guests come to town, it's natural to try to tidy things up, maybe fix that running toilet — make them feel at home. But what if 2.5 million people were visiting?

With the Olympic Games coming to Atlanta in six months, the colleges and universities around town are getting ready for the impact that this once-in-a-lifetime event will have on their campuses.

As the official "Home of the 1996 Olympic Village," the Georgia Institute of Technology, located in the middle of downtown Atlanta, will see the most action from the Games.

Construction workers have been sawing, drilling and hammering since 1991, and the noise has forced the students to build a tolerance to all the banging and clanging.

"It's really great to get all the additions to the campus, but it's been a real inconvenience," says Tech junior Jason Tsai.

The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) built a new aquatics center to house the swimming and diving events and helped remodel the Alexander Memorial Coliseum to make it fit for boxing.

Along with the construction of athletic facilities, several new apartment-style dorms have been built to house the athletes and support staff. Sophomore Rosie Tomlinson is one of many students already reaping benefits from the new dorm rooms.

"It's really a good deal," Tomlinson says. "It's a lot cheaper, closer to campus, and the place is very clean. It's much nicer than the regular old dorms."

In the summer, the new dorms and the rest of the campus will be shut off to everyone not affiliated with the Olympics. This will cause some juggling of class schedules.

The summer session, lasting only eight weeks, will begin in mid-August and end at the beginning of October. Fall quarter, also shortened, will start a week later and last until Dec. 20.

"There's no doubt that Georgia Tech students are being heavily impacted by the Olympics," says Ashley Gigandet, Olympics planner for Tech's Office of Facilities. "Yet, the Olympics will leave some wonderful legacies on our campus."

Georgia State U. will also share in the festivities. An exhibit on the history of women in the Olympic Games will be held on campus, and the folks at GSU will be playing "watch the birdie," as they host the badminton competition.

"It's good for the campus. It's going to bring a lot more people to Georgia State, but as far as the traffic and all the people coming, that could be a little scary," says GSU sophomore Vanessa DeBow.

GSU is strictly a commuter school, but an addition to its campus will be able to house 2,000 people after the Games. The new on-campus housing may make the school more attractive to out-of-state students.

Some other colleges will help the cause. Spelman College will provide practice tennis courts, Morehouse College will hold the basketball preliminaries and Clark Atlanta U. will house the field hockey venue.

Facilities are not the only resource that will be used in the Games. Students from Atlanta-area schools have shown interest in volunteering during the Olympics. In fact, several colleges have formed student groups to coordinate their efforts.

"A lot of students are involved with volunteering or employment with ACOG," says Annette Lee, director of college relations at Kennesaw State College. "This will be an interesting adventure for all of Atlanta, and we're glad to be a part of that adventure."

Being at the epicenter of all the preparation and planning has caused some students to come down with a bad case of Olympic fever.

"The Olympics is really catching on," Tomlinson says. "We've been watching the construction all along, and you can just feel the spirit in the air. It's definitely a good thing."

By David Skinner, Georgia Institute of Technology

Beam me up, Shannon.



The mystique

To reach the pinnacle of any profession is an accomplishment of giant proportion, but the tradition and pageantry that go along with the Olympics are often more impressive than the athletic feats.

U. of Southern California sophomore outfielder/pitcher Jacque Jones says the magnitude of the Olympic experience will last forever.

"Even when you get there, it won't mean as much to you as it will 10, 15 or 20 years down the line," says Jones. "You'll be too caught up in the moment. But someday you can show your kids and your grandkids that you were there."

Hinch already is looking toward the possible fulfillment of his Olympic dream.

"I've talked to former Olympians, and they tell me, 'You don't know what it's like until you get there,'" Hinch says. "My coach said the opening ceremonies were one of the most powerful times in his life."

"When we're walking down that tunnel and there's 80,000 Americans chanting U-S-A, then I'll know."

Dan Miller is the official college journalist of the 1996 Summer Olympics.