



*Casey Malone is set to compete in his fifth U.S. Olympic Trials.*

*Photo Courtesy: Scott Arnold, ProMotion Ltd.*



## Brooks: Through Smoke, Malone's Olympic Perspective Clear

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**BOULDER** - Casey Malone knows to take nothing for granted, but that life lesson has been reinforced over the last two weeks. He's participated in four U.S. Olympic Trials, making Team USA twice, with another opportunity approaching. He's watched his wife, Lindsey, pour heart, soul and body into merely earning her first trip to the Trials, which hasn't happened.

But when Malone steps into the ring to throw the discus next Monday in Eugene, Ore., his fifth Olympic Trials will be tempered by an altogether different experience. Casey and Lindsey Malone, a husband-wife team on the Colorado track and field coaching staff, are among the thousands of Coloradans near Fort Collins whose lives have been disrupted by the massive High Park fire.

The Malones are far luckier than some. Shortly after the fire started two weekends ago then mushroomed overnight, they were forced to evacuate. They were allowed to return a couple of days later and their home in the Horsetooth Mountain Park area is safe - for now.

News of the fire and its proximity to their neighborhood came from friend and former CU assistant track coach James Nyumutei while Casey was competing in a meet in New York. Nyumutei's telephone call began, "I just wanted to check on you guys and see if you were OK," Malone recalled.

His response: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Shortly thereafter, Malone found out via the national news.

The Malones flew back to Denver after the meet but didn't yet have the sense of urgency that would envelop them within the next 48 hours. After leaving DIA, they stopped in Denver to help Casey's sister celebrate a birthday before heading back to Fort Collins.

It wasn't until they reached home and Casey retreated to his deck that the gravity of the situation smacked him. "I was sitting there in awe . . . the smoke was right over the ridge across from us," he said. "We couldn't see flames, but there was this intense smoke." Added Lindsey: "It looked like a volcano."

Not long after that, sheriff's department vehicles began arriving in their neighborhood. When word came to evacuate, the Malones had about 90 minutes to pack what they could and clear out. They had some belongings and keepsakes already packed, having been forewarned by CU track coach Mark Wetmore and his experience several years ago with the Four Mile Canyon fire.

But it wasn't until they safely settled in with Casey's family for the next couple of days that this thought occurred: "We might not get back to our house before the Trials. (That) really didn't cross my mind until I was safe in my parents' house and then I thought, 'I wonder if I have all my stuff?' It seems like it's such a small thing in comparison to losing a home or a neighborhood or having somebody pass away. It's hard to even compare; it does give you some perspective. When you're safe, it makes you really appreciate that you're safe."

But the possibility remained that with the Trials approaching, Malone might be minus his gear. He began an inventory what he needed for the trek to Eugene, starting with shoes, uniform, discuses.

"It sort of created a new twist . . . I've been throwing the same discuses for about 12 years," he said. "You get used to a certain pair of shoes and you don't want to try and find new ones at the last minute."

Turns out that worry was needless and he could return to focusing making Team USA for a third time (he also was an Olympian in 2004 and 2008, with a sixth-place in '04 his best finish). Malone is "very close" to being 100 percent healthy after an on-going left knee issue created some hip and lower back complications and affected his throwing form.

Fortunately, he's had "a good mechanic . . . a wonderful resource" - his words - in USOC trainer Dustin Nabhan. The "small cartilage defect" in Malone's left knee can be a big problem for a right-handed discus thrower because he "drives off of that knee, swings around and drives off of it again. It takes my full body weight (Malone is 6-9, 290 pounds) and I've had to adjust my technique to compensate for it," he explained.

"It does feel better. I'm not sure it's where I want it to be or need it to be - and I would consider surgery (later)."

That knee and its complications aside, Malone is throwing well and said he's feeling as good about his performances as he did in 2010 when he won the USA Championship. "I felt I could go into any meet (in 2010) and throw 65 meters in any conditions," he said. "My goal my whole career was to get to that level. I considered that world class."

Indeed, it is: The Olympic 'A' standard is 65 meters, with the 'B' standard 63 meters. Malone said he's consistently throwing over 62 meters now and can make the U.S. Olympic team if he wins the Trials but still hits the 'B' standard: "That's the minimum of where I want to be."

Malone's PR is 68.6 meters, thrown in 2009 - nine years after he completed his college career at Colorado State, where he was a four-time All-American. His top throw was the best by an American in '09, making him the fifth-best performer in the world that year.

He's 35 now and believes he's still in his prime. Throwers, he tells his CU student-athletes, "can have longevity . . . they're not like gymnasts. I tell them they should stick with it another 10 years (after college). A lot of people

will say you're not going to get any stronger or faster, but it just depends on your training," he said.

"It varies greatly (and) depends on what type thrower you are. Some are incredibly strong and that's part of their throw. Some guys are benching over 400 (pounds), squatting over 700. I don't feel like I need to do that because I have leverage on my side and good vertical jump abilities. I can use that to my advantage. I would like to be stronger, of course, but I don't think I'm going to ever get as strong as some of those guys. It seems like some of those things might wear on your body faster than others."

Participating in the Olympics is "the ultimate thing" for an athlete, and Malone now has the rare opportunity to experience that in triplicate. He began his track career with a pair of goals: "To see how far I could throw and to represent this country. Everything in between that is nice - winning money, winning meets - but it's not near representing the country in the Olympic Games.

"The Olympic Games are part of the foundation of the sport of discus throwing. There's very much a sense of history when you step into that ring at the Olympic Games . . . it's almost mind-blowing to try and get perspective on how significant that is."

His perspective has never been clearer than this time around.

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