

A hamstring injury took its toll, and Lorinda Richardson failed to qualify in this summer's Olympic track and field trials. Now, she's looking forward to 1992.

Lorinda Richardson's life is like one of those wonderful melodramas from the 1940s, full of determination and insurmountable odds. At the moment, though, no one knows for sure just how this story ends.

She was 15 years old, a mere ninth grader, when she burst on the prep athletic scene with a record-setting long jump of 19 feet, 5½ inches to win the state high-school championship.

A year later, the high-school sophomore was pregnant and facing an uncertain future. "Never did I consider giving up the baby for adoption," Richardson says. She wanted the baby—but at 16, she didn't want marriage.

So with the help of her mother and younger sister, Richardson continued attending classes at Hickman High School in Columbia, where she won another state long jump title before graduating and accepting a scholarship to Mizzou.

There she embarked on a remarkable athletic career that brought her five All-America awards and six Big Eight Conference indoor and outdoor long jump and sprint titles. The highlight was being named Big Eight Female Athlete of the Year for 1987-88.

She qualified for the U.S. Olympic trials in the long jump and nearly made it in the 100-meter dash. Then in May she injured a hamstring and couldn't run much of the two months leading up to the late July trials.

But Richardson didn't excel just in athletics. At Missouri, she evolved from a mediocre student into a very good one, qualifying for the Big Eight Honor roll three times and peaking

LORINDA RICHARDSON Jumping to the future

By JAMES K. GENTRY



Jeff Adams photo

with a 3.84 grade point for the winter '87 semester.

Appropriately, a movie once gave Richardson inspiration. "I saw a show called the Wilma Rudolph Story," she says. "I watched her run, get through school, have her own business and have to work hard to get where she was. I wanted to be like her as far as sports were concerned."

So just as she should be reaching one of those seldom achieved levels of personal satisfaction, more uncertainty looms: Another year of study before graduation. The dream of the 1992 Olympics. A personal life that grows more complicated.

By now it's clear that Lorinda Richardson is unusual in many ways. In others she's like any college kid. Rick McGuire, her coach at Mizzou, puts Richardson into perspective.

"There's no question she's a special and unusual person," he says. "Of the number of 16-year-old teen-age mothers in the United States, a high percentage don't finish high school. Of those who do, a high percentage can't balance motherhood and higher education. Even fewer who graduate from high school move to the college level and along with that become upper national class—bordering on world class—athletes. And at the same time achieve excellent grades.

"Through it all, Lorinda is still a real person. She has good friends, has lapses of laziness, procrastination and loves junk food. It doesn't capture the true Lorinda to defy her."

Richardson agrees there's work to be done. "I've got a lot of finishing up to do. I see things I need to improve on. I need to work harder on school and track. I know I can do it but I've always been a little lazy."

The raw material of athletic greatness came from Richardson's parents. Her father, William, was nicknamed the Rocket and some say he was the best athlete ever produced by the Columbia high schools. "My high-

school coach, Ray Odor, who used to officiate some of my dad's games, said my dad was so fast that the officials couldn't keep up with him." Her mother, Doris, also was a standout high-school athlete in Dalton, Mo.

McGuire sees a similar physical prowess in Lorinda. "Lorinda Richardson is the female analog to the greatest star in football the state of Missouri has ever known," he says. "She'll end up retiring from competition as the greatest woman athlete in the history of Missouri, whether or not she goes to the Olympics. Right now she's the most physically fit female in the state of Missouri."

Richardson also inherited a strong appreciation for the work ethic. Her mother reared Lorinda, a brother and a sister while working as a licensed practical nurse for 24 years before she retired in 1986 with a bad back.

Fred Kolkhorst, BS Ed '71, M Ed '80, who worked with Richardson when he was men's track coach at Hickman, saw that work ethic on the track. "Lorinda's extremely coachable," he says. "She always works hard to make changes that'll help her improve."

Odor, her high-school coach, remembers Richardson had a "tremendous dedication to improve herself and a great dedication to the rest of the team. She made up her mind to go to MU and then go to the Olympics. And she's almost there."

Despite her obvious physical abilities, Richardson had to overcome a fear of performing before crowds. "I used to be scared to get out on the track and run in front of people," she says. "Through my sports psychology courses, I learned not to worry about people, just to worry about myself and how I perform. Now when I'm out there on the track or on the runway, I'm all alone. And when the event is over, the people in the stands come back."

The ability to concentrate has paid off in other areas, too. Although her grades trailed off in the winter semester, Richardson had several excellent academic semesters and hopes to graduate in May '89 with a degree in physical education. She hopes to coach track eventually.

Juggling all the demands hasn't been easy. "It's been pretty hectic," Richardson says. "I've never really

gotten to sit back and relax. It seems that just when things seem to fall into place, it's time to go off to another meet, so things get scrambled again."

In addition to managing track and athletics, there's the not-so-small matter of daughter Janae, who will start first grade in the fall. Richardson gives much of the credit to her mother. "She's helped me out a lot. When we first found out I was going to have a child, she told me I was going to finish high school, run track and finish college. She's stayed with me all the way."

Mom serves as on-call babysitter, freeing up time for Richardson to study or do homework. At home meets, Janae's "Go, Mommy, go," is heard across the Heames Center.

Richardson says Janae fills her life with inspiration. "I figure that since I have a daughter, I have to carry myself in an upright manner. She's been the driving force in getting me through high school and college. When I wanted to stop, I said to myself that if I quit Janae is going to miss out on a lot."

Richardson also finds strength for dealing with the various pressures in her religious upbringing. "I'm still pretty religious," she says. "If things go wrong, I sit down and pray about it. I started going to Sunday school at 3 or 4. And today I read the Bible and like to read Bible stories to Janae."

She's needed the strength to deal with the uncertainty that preceded the Olympic trials. Instead of arduous practices, Richardson limited her training and received treatment from a physical therapist.

The physical inactivity wasn't her biggest concern. "I've taken up to a month off before a meet and done pretty well," Richardson says. "Holding it together mentally is much tougher. In the long jump, you've got to have confidence in your approach, your run through and be mentally prepared to go down the runway with all the speed and power you have.

"I try to keep the injury out of my mind or I get kind of depressed. This is my first Olympic trial, so it's pretty disappointing. Knowing I have another chance in 1992 makes it easier to take. If not, I'd be pretty bent out of shape."

Even if Richardson's physical con-

A five-time All America, MU track star Lorinda Richardson leaped over a pit of obstacles to prove herself on the track and in the classroom.

dition had permitted hard workouts, she would have had to seek out a practice facility. The Tigers have no outdoor long jump pit, and a series of special events occupied the Hearnes Center's indoor facilities part of the time. "I would have had to go to Lincoln [University in Jefferson City]," she says.

Despite the lack of outdoor jumping areas, Mizzou has had some outstanding high and long jumpers. Richardson doesn't bring up the subject, but when asked says, "I wonder what would have happened if I'd had an outdoor pit for practice. I think it's held me back some. In the indoor season I've jumped awesome. But with the outdoor, it seems things have gone crazy. Outdoors you have so many more different conditions to deal with."

McGuire has hired Richardson as a student coach for 1988-89 and her scholarship will continue to pay for her education. "And if she stays and gets her degree, she's a near certainty for an NCAA scholarship for graduate study," McGuire says. "What better candidate for one of those awards than Lorinda Richardson?"

"She's as fine a role model as you'll ever see," McGuire adds. "This kid has consistently worked hard to develop herself, to rise above, to overcome obstacles. Disadvantaged youngsters need to see people like her, to know that there is hope, that you can make it. Nobody in the world could be a better role model for Columbia youngsters than Lorinda."

Richardson agrees. "I know teenagers who want to do things but don't think they can make it. I hope they'll read about me and see they can do it, too."

But she doesn't necessarily think mid-Missouri is the only place she can do that. "Sometimes it bothers me to think about leaving here, but as a college athlete I've met a lot of coaches and Coach McGuire knows a lot. I think I could get some good job references in a number of places."

Out there somewhere, perhaps in the next scene, is another goal.

"I want to be on an Olympic team. If not, I'll feel I missed out on something." Then she adds, "There's a big jump waiting for me somewhere. I dream about it. I dream about being No. 1 in the world." □

Darryl Darling (58), Steve Vandegrift (71) and Lee Johnson (98) return to a defensive line that showed great improvement last season.



Jeff Adams photo

Tigers Need Momentum of Winning Season

"Mizzou Mo . . . Mentum"—the promotional slogan for the Tiger football season—got an earlier-than-expected start in July when Athletic Director Jack Lengyel's momentum propelled him to a new job as AD of the U.S. Naval Academy.

Now it will be up to interim AD Dick Tamburo or his successor to find the momentum to get the fans back in the stands at Faurot Field. Obviously, nothing would help more than the momentum generated by a winning football team.

And a winning season is something yet to be accomplished by Coach Woody Widenhofer, soon to begin his fourth campaign at MU—and the final season on his current contract. Before Lengyel left, you got the feeling he was expecting a 7-4 season in 1988 to keep the improvement on a satisfactory curve.

Sporting News thinks Missouri has a chance for a winning season. Its pre-season publication ranked the Tigers 38th in the country. Widenhofer expects a winning season, too.

This is what he says about the defense, which showed great progress in 1987:

"The defense is probably the most important part of the whole football team. They're flying around the football. Our second defensive unit is better than the first one we had in 1985."

The offense: "Our No. 1 goal last year was to be very conservative, to run the

football and learn as much as we could about the Flexbone as we went along. We're at the point now where we can open it up a little bit more and be a little bit more complex."

The kicking game: "I'd say replacing Tom Whelihan is a big concern."

Whelihan, the most prolific—and exuberant—kicker in Tiger history may be gone, but many solid performers return.

Tight end Tim Bruton was picked the top tight end in the country by *Sporting News*. Others of all-conference quality include offensive tackle Carl Bax, center Curtis Wilson, quarterback John Stollenwerck, fullback Tommie Stowers, defensive end Steve Vandegrift and cornerback Adrian Jones.

Another hopeful sign: MU never has had a losing season in any year that ended with an 8. But, then, they didn't play in 1918. —Steve Shinn

Tiger Schedule

Sept. 10	Utah State
Sept. 17	Houston
Sept. 24	Indiana
Oct. 1	at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 8	at Kansas State
Oct. 15	Iowa State (Homecoming)
Oct. 22	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 29	at Nebraska
Nov. 5	Colorado
Nov. 12	Oklahoma
Nov. 19	at Kansas

