



NEWS RELEASE

# Olympic Gold Medalist Continues Her Remarkable Journey at Dick's

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MBA strategy intern Taylor Ritzel rowed Team USA to gold at the 2012 Olympics

Taylor Ritzel, far left, is an Olympic gold medalist and a DICK'S MBA strategy intern.

Taylor Ritzel's childhood dream was to swim her way to Olympic gold. She eventually earned that gold medal on the water, but not exactly how she planned it.

A switch from swimming to rowing led to Ritzel helping Team USA win gold in the women's eight at the 2012 Olympic Games in London. Prior to that, she established her championship pedigree by restoring Yale's powerhouse status in rowing and becoming a collegiate All-American and three-time NCAA champion.

Perhaps the most impressive part? She didn't pick up an oar until she was a senior in high school. In short time, Ritzel became part of the fastest boat in the world, but getting to that point was not a straight route with smooth sailing.

This summer, Ritzel joined the team at DICK'S Sporting Goods as an MBA Strategy Intern, right as the summer games were about to begin in Tokyo. The position was a perfect fit for the former Olympian who has continued to show the kind of grit and intelligence that resulted in her standing atop the sports world.

From Colorado to London

Ritzel grew up on a ranch in Colorado and is the granddaughter of former Denver Broncos football coach Red Miller, who led the Denver Broncos to Super Bowl XII. Watching him coach, listening to his stories and soaking in the



memorabilia lining the walls of his basement helped instill in Ritzel a love of big-time sports and stoked her fire for competition.

She took up swimming as a kid and chuckles as she recalls hating it before falling in love. She also participated in basketball, volleyball, track and cross country. It was in the water, though, where she felt most at home.

A nagging illness during her junior year resulted in Ritzel missing out on the swim season and falling behind in a crucial year for college recruiting. But Ritzel, a self-proclaimed late bloomer who grew eight inches taller during high school, was undeterred and had her sights set on the Ivy League schools known for their academic and athletic excellence.

Her visits to the schools did not result in an offer to swim. Ritzel's mother also had set up meetings with the rowing coaches during a visit to Yale. There was just one problem for Ritzel: She had never even heard of the sport. The coaching staff took her around on a boat and gave her a rundown on rowing.

"I had no idea what I was watching," said Ritzel.

The coaches saw through her limited experience and focused on her potential. On the way home Ritzel got good news. There was a spot for her on the team if she wanted it.

Yale had not won an NCAA rowing championship since 1979 before Ritzel arrived. She helped the Bulldogs to three titles in four years.

"Yale was a great place to develop and learn as an athlete," Ritzel said. "It was life-changing."

Ritzel continued her remarkable ascent, making the under-23 national team before earning an invitation to train with the senior national team and, eventually, she earned a spot on the Olympic squad for the 2012 summer games in London.

### Let The Games Begin

Coming into the games, the United States had not lost a major race on the national stage in years. The pressure was on and the team was focused. In fact, they did not even attend the opening ceremony to avoid staying on their feet for the eight-hour duration and conserved their energy.

The 2,000-meter race is a grueling, all-out sprint that goes by in a flash. Years of finely-tuned training culminate in a burst of intense competition.

Canada had pushed the U.S. to the brink during their previous race in the World Cup, yet Ritzel's team was able to hang on and win by less than a second. During the Olympic heats to determine the race finalists, the Canadian team actually posted a faster time than Team USA did in its heat.

"We knew that they were going to be close and a serious contender," said Ritzel. "You don't want to be a part of that boat that loses for the first time since 2005."

When the race began, Ritzel's boat took an early lead and never relinquished. She was a gold medalist just six years after picking up an oar for the first time.

The crowning achievement did not come easy for Ritzel, who was the youngest on the boat. She had fought through the aches and pains of the strenuous sport and suffered through the loss of her mother from breast cancer. The gold medal was not just a tribute to her dedication, but also those who believed and pushed her to become great.

"I went back to training a week after my mom died," said Ritzel. "I missed other family and social events. I fought through injuries. For me, it was a culmination that all this was really worth it."

### Staying Golden

The competitive spirit never really leaves an athlete and aspects of it follow wherever they go. For Ritzel, her spirit of challenging herself with something new and homing in on it is evident in her post-rowing career.

At the age of 26, she began her first full-time job in the mail room at a talent agency in Los Angeles. Passing out mail was far from glamorous.

"You need to get used to more ambiguity and be a novice again and sort of start over," said Ritzel.

Ritzel's used her passion, intelligence and ability to blaze a new trail. She eventually became a creative executive at Hulu and Netflix, where she worked to secure numerous shows for the streaming giants. But one thing was missing.

"I really missed and wanted to get back to my roots in sports," said Ritzel. "I like the intersection of strategy and sports."

As the summer games begin, Ritzel will be watching, this time from afar as she has settled into her new role with the strategy team at DICK'S.

"The culture, support and good nature of everyone really broke through," said Ritzel. "For me, culture, team

dynamics and having great leadership is something that I prioritize. It's what matters most. I'm excited to see where it takes me."