

Olympics

Fathers know best: Former NFL standouts coach daughters toward Rio

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In this March 18, 2016, file photo, Randall Cunningham poses with his daughter Vashti, in Portland, Ore. Vashti Cunningham has a good chance of bringing home a medal from the Rio de Janeiro Games.

The teenage high jump phenom lives at home and carools to practice. Same with the 30-year-old American record-holder in the shot put.

These two medal hopefuls at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics also have this in common: A father for a coach whose last name is certainly recognizable to most football fans.

Vashti Cunningham's dad is longtime NFL quarterback Randall Cunningham, who built a track club in Las Vegas to help his daughter — and son — soar to new heights in the high jump. Michelle Carter's father is Michael Carter, a stalwart defensive lineman who used to routinely drive 340 miles roundtrip to offer her shot put tips.

Anything for their kids. Being down a touchdown on the football field isn't nearly as pressure-packed as watching their children from the stands.

"The heart is invested," said Cunningham, a second-round pick of the Philadelphia Eagles in 1985 who played 16 seasons for four teams. "Whenever your heart is invested, you're going through all the emotions."

Randall began coaching his daughter and his son, Randall II — now at Southern California — when they were just kids. A standout in the high jump in high school, he turned his focus to football at UNLV because the school didn't have men's track and field.

He's part mentor, part instructor but most of all, dad.

And dad certainly knows his stuff. Three months ago, 18-year-old Vashti became the youngest woman to win the event at world indoor championships in Portland, Oregon. Soon after, she signed a deal with Nike. Her brother recently won an NCAA high jump title.

"Good genetics," said Randall, who coaches a track team in Las Vegas called the Nevada Gazelles. "I put confidence in her to jump (high). She trusts her dad. A lot of people who don't know the sport and try to coach their kid fail because their kid doesn't trust them."

She diligently listens, too. "We have a good relationship, because he knows my limits, as far as my father and my coach," Vashti said. "I can't go in there and mess up with the knowledge he's transferred to me."

Growing up, Michelle never really knew her father as Michael Carter the shot putter, only Michael Carter the San Francisco 49ers defensive lineman.

It's not like the silver medal he captured at the 1984 Summer Olympics was hanging around the house or anything.

In seventh grade, Michelle expressed a desire to try the shot put. At first, dad was a little hesitant, thinking maybe she was enticed by someone who informed her that he was once a thrower.

Not the case, she insisted. "He just wanted us to pick it for ourselves," Michelle explained. "When I picked it up, he said, 'Well, if you're going to do this, I'm going to teach you how to do this and you're going to do it right.'"

Michael worked with her

through a record-breaking high school career, and thought his coaching days were done once she went to the University of Texas. But he was asked to help out and so he drove from Dallas to Austin every two weeks to offer some guidance.

Dad certainly knew his shot put, too. Michelle has blossomed into one of the world's top throwers, winning six U.S. outdoor titles. She also set the American outdoor record of 66 feet, 5 inches (20.24 meters) in 2013 and broke the nation's indoor mark with a throw of 66-3/4 (20.21) to capture a world title in March.

Usually not one to show much emotion, Michael bubbled over when he hugged her back stage after her record-setting win.

"My daddy is a big, old teddy bear," Michelle said. "I'm glad we're able to share those moments together."

These days, he's dad, coach and roommate.

Not too long ago, Michelle tried to buy a house. When it fell through, she moved in

"No one can teach our child better than we can because of knowledge we had in the beginning."

— Michael Carter, Former NFL defensive lineman and current coach to his daughter Michelle, who is a medal hopeful in shot put in the upcoming Olympics

with her parents until after the Olympics.

Michelle and her dad carpool to practice most days, along with their dog named Ryder. While Michelle throws the shot at practice, Michael tosses the ball to Ryder.

And when they get home, they talk shot. They're always talking about the shot put, even when they say they're not going to.

Occupational hazard. "It's hard for my dad to leave it out of the conversation," Michelle said. "It consumes your whole life."

Just like football once did — for Michael and Randall.

The two gridiron greats hadn't seen each other in decades before crossing paths last March at the world indoor. At first, Randall didn't recognize Micheal until he scrambled to put on his glasses and read the name on the credential of the big man standing in front of him.

Oh yeah, Michael Carter, the San Francisco 49ers Pro Bowler who used to chase Cunningham around the football field.

"I was like, 'I see now that you're old,'" Michael chuckled.

Honest mistake, Cunningham asserted.

"Of course I remember him — a great player," Randall said.

Now they're both coaching their daughters, who are both strong contenders for Olympic medals.

FINALS: Golden State is 3-0 in elimination games

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is at best a shaky proposition now. Game 7 of the finals is on Sunday against the Cleveland Cavaliers, and Golden State is hoping being at home helps deliver a championship-saving elixir.

"Things haven't gone our way despite how the regular season went," Warriors guard Stephen Curry said. "The playoffs haven't been easy. Hasn't been a breeze. Hasn't been anything perfect about it. So, yeah, it's frustrating, but the work we've put in and the opportunity we've given ourselves with a Game 7 to win the finals at home, you've got to be excited about that."

The Warriors got questions for months — starting around December, believe it or not — about whether they were concerned that the strain of chasing Chicago's 72-win mark that stood as the NBA's gold standard for 20 years would leave them ailing or fatigued at playoff time.

Questions like those seem a bit more valid now.

To be clear, Andrew Bogut's left knee didn't become susceptible to

season-ending bone bruises because of how difficult becoming the league's first 73-win regular-season team was; J.R. Smith crashing into him in Game 5 of this series took care of that. Curry's combination of fouling out, mouthpiece-throwing and getting ejected in Game 6 on Thursday night wasn't because the first 82 games left him tired and cranky.

And the Warriors' inability to corral LeBron James in this series can be best explained by acknowledging again that when James is at his best he's the most unstoppable force in the game.

The grind of March and April has nothing to do with any of that.

But it can certainly be argued that even though the Warriors spent about half the season without head coach Steve Kerr while he recovered from back surgeries and got every opponent's best shot in every game — such is life for reigning champions — the playoffs have delivered more challenges in 20something games (including a 3-1 deficit in the Western Conference finals

against Oklahoma City) than the first 82 offered combined.

"I think if you start out every season and you say, 'We get a Game 7, we get one game at home to win the NBA championship,' I'll take it every time," Kerr said. "So I can't wait for Sunday. I think we'll be fine. Obviously Cleveland has played well the last two games, and we've got to play better. But I'm confident we will. We're in a spot that 29 other teams would love to be in."

Kerr got fined \$25,000 on Friday for being critical of referees after Golden State's loss in Game 6, and Curry got fined another \$25,000 for throwing his mouthpiece into the stands after fouling out of that game.

If the Warriors — who are still steamed that Draymond Green was suspended for Game 5 because he accrued one too many flagrant fouls in this postseason — find calls more to their liking in Game 7, that'll be money extremely well spent.

"We're going to need some emotion and some grit and toughness," said Curry, who noted the Warriors are

already 3-0 in elimination games this season.

Their problems go deeper than officiating issues, though. The Warriors don't have a single starter shooting 50 percent in this series, are clearly a different defensive team with Bogut sidelined, have 2015 Finals MVP Andre Iguodala playing with wince-inducing lower back soreness, have yielded two straight 41-point games to James and are in their first extended slide of the season — losing three times in a four-game span.

If shots fall at their usual clip on Sunday, the Warriors will probably win.

Otherwise, a team that looks like it's limping to the finish could see its reign end.

"We all realize if you told us at the beginning of the season it would be one game to win the championship in Oakland, we'll take that any day of the week," shooting guard Klay Thompson said. "We've just got to come Sunday with the mindset of leave it all out there, every man on this team. No hero ball, just do it as a team like we've been doing it all year."

the Warriors' home floor in Oakland, California. Neither decision by the NBA was a surprise; the league precedent for throwing a mouthpiece is a fine in most cases, and the Warriors weren't worried about the MVP being suspended for the last game of the season.

It was Curry's first ejection, and his time fouling out since Dec. 13, 2013.

"It got the best of me," Curry said, "but I'll be all right for next game."

Game 7 is Sunday on

RUSSIA: Clean athletes may apply to compete neutrally

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"Russian athletes could not credibly return to international competition without undermining the confidence of their competitors and the public," IAAF President Sebastian Coe said.

President Vladimir Putin condemned the decision, saying he still hopes for "some solution" that will allow the Russians to compete in Rio.

"Clean athletes shouldn't suffer," he told a meeting of leaders of major international news agencies in St. Petersburg.

Russia does not accept "collective punishment" for all athletes, Putin added, comparing the ban for the entire team to a prison sentence that "an entire family" could get if one of its relatives has committed a crime.

Russia's Sports Ministry also said Rio Games will be "diminished" by the absence of its athletes, and the Russian track federation said it was considering an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport — the sports world's highest court.

The IAAF, track's world governing body, left open a "tiny crack" that would allow any individual Russian athletes who have been untainted by doping and have been subjected to effective testing outside Russia to apply to compete in the games.

However, the IAAF said those athletes would be few and would be eligible to compete only as "individuals" — and not under the Russian flag.

"The crack in the door is quite narrow and there won't be many who manage to get through that crack in the door," said Rune Andersen, the Norwegian anti-doping expert who headed the IAAF task force that determined that Russia's reforms were not enough.

The IAAF said it was necessary to ban the entire track and field team because there was no way to verify which athletes could be considered clean.

"The system in Russia has been tainted by doping from the top level down," Andersen said. "We cannot trust that what people might call clean athletes are really clean. If you have one or two or five with negative tests, it does not mean the athletes are clean. History has shown that is not the case."

Coe dismissed suggestions there were any political motivations behind the decision.

"There were members from all four corners of the world, and the decision was unanimous," he said. "Politics did not play a part today."

The ruling came four days before a sports summit called by the IOC to address "the difficult decision between collective responsibility and individual justice."

The IOC said it had "taken note" of the IAAF ruling and that its executive board will meet by teleconference Saturday to "discuss the appropriate next steps."

There has been speculation the IOC could overrule the IAAF or impose a compromise that would allow "clean" Russian athletes to compete. However, Coe made clear that the IAAF runs the sport and determines which athletes are eligible, not the IOC.

"I don't have a message for the IOC," said Coe, who will attend Tuesday's meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. "Eligibility is a matter for the IAAF."

The suspension of the Russian federation, known as RusAF, was imposed in November following a report by a World Anti-Doping Agency commission that alleged state-sponsored cheating, corruption and cover-ups. On Wednesday, WADA

issued a new report citing continuing obstruction and violations of drug-testing in Russia.

"The deep-seated culture of tolerance, or worse, for doping that led RusAF being suspended in the first appears not to have changed materially to date," the IAAF said.

Coe said the unanimous decision by the 25 members of the IAAF council to maintain the ban sends "a very clear signal to athletes and the public about our intention to reform our sport."

The decision was hailed by many sports officials and athletes' groups outside Russia who have been pushing the IAAF to take a hard line to restore some credibility to the much-maligned global anti-doping system.

"It gives a measure of hope to clean athletes that there are consequences not only for athletes who dope, but for countries which do not engage seriously in the fight against doping," U.S. Olympic Committee CEO Scott Blackmun said. "That is a much-needed message."

Added U.S. Anti-Doping Agency chief executive Travis Tygart: "Obviously, banning Russian track and field from the Olympics is the right outcome. The world's clean athletes came together and demanded that their voices were heard."

In expressing its disappointment, the Russian Sports Ministry appealed to IOC members to "consider the impact that our athletes' exclusion will have on the dreams and the people of Russia."

"Clean athletes' dreams are being destroyed because of the reprehensible behavior of other athletes and officials," the ministry said. "They have sacrificed years of their lives striving to compete at the Olympics and now that sacrifice looks likely to be wasted."

It added that the Olympics "are supposed to be a source of unity, and we hope that they remain as a way of bringing people together."

The IAAF rejected a last-minute plea by Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko, who claimed the country had cleaned up its anti-doping system and met all the requirements for readmission.

"We firmly believe that clean athletes should not be punished for the actions of others," he said in an open letter to Coe.

Two-time Olympic pole vault champion Yelena Isinbayeva was among the Russian athletes hoping to compete in Rio. She has threatened to go to court on human rights grounds if she is excluded from the games. Other cases could end up in CAS, the Swiss-based appeals court.

The IAAF did change its rules to make way for "any individual athletes who can clearly and convincingly show that they are not tainted" by doping and who have been outside Russia and subject to effective drug-testing systems.

Those individuals can apply to a special IAAF committee for permission to compete as a "neutral athlete," not for Russia.

The IAAF also recommended that Russian whistleblower Yulia Stepanova be allowed to compete at the Olympics as an independent athlete. The 800-meter runner who served a doping ban gave information along with her husband that led to a broad investigation of doping inside Russia.

The IAAF task force recommended she be allowed to compete because of the "extraordinary contribution" she made to the anti-doping effort.

Wilson reported from London. AP National Writer Eddie Pells and AP Sports Writer James Ellingworth also contributed.