



CHRISTIAN TAYLOR: AMERICAN OLYMPIC CHAMPION COMES HOME TO THE NETHERLANDS

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He doesn't go skiing with his Austrian girlfriend or go see an Ajax soccer match out of fear for injuries, but he will leave home and hearth in order to become an even better athlete thousands of miles away: triple jump athlete Christian Taylor (27) will do anything for his career. This has earned the American two Olympic as well as three world titles so far. 'But I've learned in the Netherlands that not everything is about winning.'



Taylor is curious and open-minded. He would love to build a training centre for youths growing up in poor living conditions to keep them on the straight and narrow and to provide them with a good future in sports. Definitely not before ending his career in his own country during the 2021 World Championship, though. He would prefer to add another world record and gold medals for the triple jump and 4×400 metres relay to his curriculum before then. He knows this requires blinkers. 'I cannot afford to be even the least amount distracted. Either I give something my all or I don't do it.

This is why the 27-year-old American has already moved house countless times. He moved from his birthplace of Fayetteville (Georgia) to Florida, where he continued to develop himself in university, and he later followed his coach Rana Reider to England and the Netherlands. Tumbleweeds, that's how Taylor once jokingly referred to his entourage. Because Reider's athletes are always on the move, just like tumbleweeds. Their final destination: to become even better.

Never going home again

The man who made the second furthest jump ever at 18.21 metres did find peace in Papendal since the beginning of 2015. 'I have never lived this long in one place, besides my youth and college years. If it's up to me we'll stay here. I'm continuously urging my coach to keep the relationship with NOC*NSF as good as possible.'

Why he prefers to be in the Netherlands to invest in himself? 'The sports ambiance is great at Papendal. I share my house with athletes practising all kinds of sports. Their dreams and drive to better themselves every day inspire me. It's like living in an Olympic village year-round.

Taylor is probably the best-known athlete to walk around Papendal on a daily basis. His Dutch training buddies can teach him little in the ways of sports techniques. 'But they did teach me something more important: finding balance,' says the fresh world champion, the London 2017 gold medal still in hand. 'I was raised in the American system where the only thing that counts is winning and to destroy your opponents. The Dutch have showed me that you can combine the drive to be the best with having fun. Why wouldn't it be possible for me to both go for a walk on the Noordwijk beach and prepare in the most optimal way for the World Championship? This Dutch mentality has given me more enjoyment of the sport.'

Discovering a new country

What he also enjoyed: discovering the country. Ever since Athletics Union Director Ad Roskam brought him in contact with TopSportLease (TSL) two years ago, the triple jump athlete has been crossing the country in his TSL vehicle on his days off. 'Den Haag, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Giethoorn: I've been nearly everywhere. I can recommend every foreign sportsman to make use of TSL's leasing possibilities. Their cars are beautiful, their service is perfect, and it gives you the freedom to discover your new country. It's bizarre how many gorgeous things you can see on such a small piece of land. Arnhem itself, with it's beautiful Rijn, has really become my city. Almost no-one knows who I am in America, but here people recognise me as I walk down the street. I love that.'

This led to a remarkable moment when Taylor, having just conquered his second Olympic title, wanted to leave Rio de Janeiro after last year's Games. A Dutch woman approached him on the airport. She told him her brother had steered the gondola Taylor had been on in Giethoorn the month before. The man had been unable to comprehend that that very same athlete had flown towards the gold medal on his television only a couple of weeks later.

'It's unbelievable that you can meet someone in such a way in Rio's enormous mass of people,' Taylor beams. 'It was my best Olympic experience besides the golden medal. That meeting showed me how small and close-knit the Netherlands can be. I feel as if I have roots somewhere for the first time in my life. When I was flying from Rio to Schiphol, it felt like going home. It's true, I've started to feel a bit Dutch.'

Note: Original Dutch version of this story available at topsportlease.nl