

## **Uzoma Orji Named USATF – New England Athlete of the Month for May**



Photo by Stanley Hu / AccelPhoto

BOSTON – **Uzoma Orji**, age 22, a graduating senior at MIT, has been named USA Track & Field New England's Athlete of the Month for May 2006. On May 5-6, at the NCAA New England Division III championships in Springfield, MA, Orji kicked off a month of stellar achievement by winning the shot put and hammer throw. In the hammer he set an MIT record with a throw of 205'9". On May 12-14, at the IC4A championships in Princeton, NJ, competing primarily against athletes from Division I schools, Orji placed 4<sup>th</sup> in the shot put and 5<sup>th</sup> in the hammer. The next weekend, May 18-19 at the ECAC Division III championships in Springfield, MA, he won the shot put and hammer and set a meet record in the shot.

Finally, on May 25-27 at the NCAA Division III National Championships held at Benedictine College in Illinois, Orji capped his month of high achievement by placing second in the hammer, then winning his first national championship title in the shot put. His winning throw of 60' 2 1/2" set a Division III championship meet and MIT school record.

Orji was subsequently named NCAA Division III field event athlete of the meet. Earlier in May, MIT selected him as their Outstanding Athlete of the Year. A true student athlete, whose academic accomplishments match his accomplishments as an athlete, Orji recently received his Bachelor of Science from MIT with a 4.9 GPA (out of 5) in electrical science and engineering. In 2005, ESPN The Magazine named him to their Academic All-America team and he came in third in balloting for their Academic All-America of the Year award.

Orji was born in Chicago to parents who emigrated from Nigeria. He attended high school in Matawan, NJ, where his family still lives. Asked about his progress as a thrower and his peak performances in May, Orji was reflective and analytic.

He attributed much of his success this past outdoor season to the positive challenges that he set for himself as he chased 200 feet in the hammer throw and 60 feet in the shot put. He talked of feeling rejuvenated as an athlete as he adopted new techniques, for example, converting from the "glide" to the "spin" technique in the shot. The learning and the challenge went beyond simple technical changes, as he also needed to modulate his emotional intensity, staying calm and relaxed in order to facilitate quick and fluid execution of his throws. He described this as "controlling the rage" and letting it out only at the last moment as he released the implement.

Orji plans to continue at MIT next year to pursue a master's degree in electrical science and engineering and then plans to apply to Ph.D. programs.

*USATF-NE provides opportunities for athletes of all ages to pursue excellence in running, race walking, and track and field, from grassroots to elite level*

**Athlete of the Month is a program for USATF-New England and is designed to recognize outstanding performers at all levels of the sport. USATF-NE will name a new honoree each month and feature the athlete on the USATF-NE website.**