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Deaf Brooklyn shot-putter comes home after winning gold medal at Summer Deaflympics in Taipei

BY **JAKE PEARSON**
 DAILY NEWS WRITER

Wednesday, September 30th 2009, 4:00 AM



Siegel for News

Joanel Lopez of Crown Heights, who lost his hearing as 2-year-old after a bout with meningitis, won the gold medal in the shot put at the Summer Deaflympics in Taipei last month.

It was a golden opportunity.

Joanel Lopez, 24, a **Crown Heights** shot put star, has returned triumphantly to **Brooklyn** after winning the gold medal at the Summer Deaflympics in **Taipei**.

"Of course I was nervous," wrote Lopez in an e-mail. "But worse [than competing] was ... the taxi."

Lopez said driving to Taipei Stadium was harrowing.

"Taiwan's traffic system seemed a little odd for me," he said. "When they drive [there] ... they go this way and turn that way."

In Taiwan, Lopez launched the 16-pound ball 16.26 meters - nearly 54 feet - to win the gold. He also set a personal best in the hammer throw.

"It [was] an inspiration," he wrote.

The **St. Frances School** for the Deaf graduate also took time to visit the country and see the sights.

"I've been to **Taipei 101** building, Night Market, schools and more," he wrote. "They were nice places to visit."

Lopez, who became deaf as a 2-year-old after a bout with meningitis, had a busy summer. He graduated **SUNY-Binghamton** in May and then spent three months training and fund-raising for his competition last month.

After the Brooklyn News first ran Lopez's story in June, readers from across the country sent donations to help pay the \$4,500 needed in registration fees and airfare.

He returned to Brooklyn a champion, on Sept. 16.

"My competitions in Taiwan were great," he wrote.

Now that he's back in the borough, Lopez plans to take it easy for just a bit, playing basketball and hanging out with friends.

But competing in the **2012 London Olympics** is his next goal - a goal he's determined to achieve.

"I have to keep my work ethic now," wrote the 6-foot-1, 235-pound athlete. "The [training] process already started before Deaflympics."

Lopez faces an equally challenging hurdle now that he's back home: The star athlete is in search of a job.

"He's an environmental science major so he's looking," said his mother, Rose Tertilus, 61, a home health aide. "He comes to live with me but he needs to find a job now."

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