

Dream realized in final event

Munich.

It worked a miracle for Bruce Jenner—a 22-year-old from tiny Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa.

The obscure decathlete burst by the leaders in the 1500 meters Tuesday—the final event in the Olympic Trials decathlon—and slashed nine seconds off his lifetime best, running 4:16.9.

For Jenner, who ranked no better than fifth or sixth in the nation this season coming into the Trials, it was good enough to make the team.

"I gotta call my parents," he laughed, still searching for an explanation to his storybook finale.

"I was 11th after the first day and I told them I had a chance for maybe fifth or sixth."

His prediction would have been much closer if it hadn't been for a fine 207-3½ heave in the javelin, the ninth of 10 grueling events. It gave him 800 points and suddenly he found himself in fifth place, behind Jeff Bannister, Jeff Bennett, Steve Gough, and Fred Samara.

It was 127 points from the Olympics.

"I never thought I had a chance until I heard the scores after the javelin," he said.

"When I started the 1500, I knew I had a chance."

It meant a frantic finish after 13 hours of competition in Hayward's searing 95-degree temperatures.

Bannister and Bennett could coast with their places secured. For Gough, Samara, Andrew Pettes, and Jenner, it decided everything.

Jenner ran a 2:22 first half and was dissatisfied with the pace.

"I thought it was too slow. I wanted about a 2:17."

Then, with little less than a lap left, the PE major from Sandy Brook, Conn. made his run to Munich.

He blew past Bennett and Bannister and opened up a 35-yard lead.

To secure third place, he would need a mark six seconds under his lifetime best.

Instead he ran nine seconds faster, got 682 points, and was America's third man in this event by a scant 24 points over Gough.

Bannister, the champion with a world-leading 8120, was surprised at the way it came out.

"I wouldn't have bet on it," he smiled. "I guess the guy who was in the best shape came through."

But Jenner's performance, which must rank as one of the most inspiring of the Trials, was perhaps better explained by Army's Bennett—the runnerup.

Somebody told him of Jenner's feat—chopping nearly 10 seconds off a lifetime best.

He nodded. "You can do that when you have to though . . . I took six seconds off mine at the AAU (to win)."

"To tell you the truth," said Bennett, "I thought anybody'd win but who won. I was thinking about Gough and Pettis. I didn't even consider Jenner."

Few did.

"My first day was decent, but not exceptional," said the jubilant Jenner. "I didn't have any exceptional events except the 1500."

His previous best was 7678 points in the decathlon, and as late as the NAIA championships he was an unheralded third place.

And as late as 12½ hours into the competition, nobody gave him a thought.

But in an Olympic year, storybook finishes are the order of the day.

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