

Sports

Is Crouser, Wilkins a good comparison? No doubt about it

By Doug Levy
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Four years ago, Oregon men's track coach Bill Dellinger unveiled a new recruit, a discus thrower and shotputter from Gresham High School with enormous potential.

Dellinger harbored expectations for this recruit to replace Ray Burton in the discus and Vince Goldsmith in the shot.

Four years later, Dean Crouser hasn't disappointed anyone.

After winning both the NCAA discus and shotput last year, Crouser stamped himself as a valid contender in both events for the 1984 Olympics.

Crouser's feat, an NCAA double win, is not an easy one. In fact, his exceptional prowess in both the discus and the shot brings back memories of another Oregon great — Mac Wilkins.

It seemed inevitable that Crouser would be compared to Wilkins. Both are fine athletes, strong, agile throwers able to excel in not just one event, but two.

Most people tend to think of Wilkins strictly as a discus thrower, but he too was a shotputter of distinction in college.

And while he went on to win the 1976 gold medal in the discus with a toss of 232-6, Wilkins has all but forgotten the shot.

So, the questions surface. Can Crouser be as good as Wilkins? Can he throw both the discus and the shot in the future? Is he ahead of where Wilkins was at this stage?

One thing is for sure. Crouser's college marks are definitely ahead of those compiled by Wilkins. Crouser's best of 213-0 in the discus surpasses Wilkins' 212-0 mark his senior year, and Crouser's 69-1 1/4 mark in the shot (ranking him fourth in the world) tops Wilkins' lifetime best of 69-1 1/4.

"Dean has already surpassed what Mac did in college," says Dellinger. "Even in his best year (1973) Mac was first in the discus and third in the shot."

Frank Morris, who coached Wilkins and Crouser before moving on to coach Oregon State three years ago, agrees.

"Dean is obviously ahead of Mac at this stage. As for the future, I don't know. Their strength and technique are very comparable."

Crouser himself is a great admirer of Wilkins.

"Mac is so intense that he just can't stand being second best," says Crouser. "I hope I can be that intense."

Score one for Crouser on college credentials. But can he be as good as Wilkins? Can he win a gold medal in either the discus or the shot?

"So much can happen," says Crouser. "But I feel really good about my future."

Wilkins, reached at his home in San Jose, confesses to being a Crouser fan.

"I am very impressed with Dean from what I have seen. Physically and technically, he has the capability to throw 230 feet in the discus."

"But an important thing," continues Wilkins, "is his mental makeup. Does he have the right mental makeup to continue throwing and improving? That's something where only time will tell for Dean. That'll be the key."

If he maintains the desire he has now, few question that Crouser can be a success in the '84 Olympics, but Dellinger, Morris and Wilkins all maintain that, sooner or later, Crouser will have to make a choice between the discus and the shot.

"Somewhere down the line, I think Dean will find that it's to his advantage to pick one or the other," says Dellinger.

Morris feels Crouser should choose the shotput.

"I think Dean will have to decide on one event by next year," says Morris. "Personally, I think he should choose the shotput, because he can go very far in that event. I don't think he's strong enough to be a factor in the discus."

Adds Wilkins, "I chose the discus because I thought I could do better at it. But I was a national shotput champion indoors (in 1977). It can be very helpful to choose one."

Despite the advice of coaches and competitors alike, Crouser wants to stick to both events.

"I think I can do both," says Crouser confidently. "One of the things I have going for me is that I'm a better athlete than a lot of the guys I face. The thing with Mac, he was throwing 215-222 in the discus and 63-64 in the shot. It made sense for him to switch."

However, Crouser admits that before he can worry about doubling, or winning either event, he must improve his strength.

"That's where I'm behind the guys throwing now — in strength. I've been relying on technique, and it'll be hard to develop more than I have if I don't get stronger."

Morris is more succinct on this point.

"Mac always had such great



Photo by Bob Baker

Whether Dean Crouser should continue to throw the discus is up in the air as Olympic champion Mac Wilkins and a former coach says he should specialize in the shot put if he wants to win gold in the '84 Olympics.

strength. Dean has to improve on his strength some. I would say that among 65-foot throwers, Dean is the weakest shotputter in America."

The jury, then, is still out on how far Crouser can go in the future, and whether he can duplicate the feats of Wilkins.

Both Dellinger and Morris, though, see similarities in the two that make them great competitors.

"My observation about Mac and Dean is that they are both very dedicated athletes," says Dellinger. "Each of them is willing to learn, willing to do whatever it takes to improve."

For Wilkins, that has meant revising his technique some; for Crouser, it has meant a few more visits to the weight room.

Morris thinks the secret to the success of Wilkins and Crouser is athletic ability.

"Mac was an outstanding football and basketball player in high school (in Beaverton) and an eight-handicap golfer too," says Morris with a laugh,

"and I think Dean can do anything he puts his mind to. And both of them are outstanding javelin throwers."

Comparisons aside, Crouser and Wilkins are each looking forward to big things in 1984.

"Last year I was very disappointed in myself," says Wilkins. "I was frustrated with my performances, and I still ranked third in the world. So I definitely think I can do better and win a medal in '84."

Crouser says, "I want to throw 225 in the discus, and I think I can throw 10 feet farther in the shotput."

Neither of these men are lacking in confidence. Both seem humble about their accomplishments, but very sure of themselves at the same time.

The man who coached both Wilkins and Crouser, Morris, is also very confident about what they can do in '84.

"I'd almost be willing to bet," he says, "that both of them will win medals — Mac in the discus, Dean in the shot."



Photo by Mark Pynes