

THE OLYMPICS

Olympic trials win
still shocks Blair

■ **GAMES:** Jackie Joyner-Kersey now has to look up to Kelly Blair after heptathlon upset last month

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — For more than a decade, Jackie Joyner-Kersey dominated the heptathlon. Whenever she was healthy, whenever she was able to complete the tough seven-event competition, nobody beat her.

Not in the United States, not in the world.

She was so good she owned the top six marks in history, including the world record of 7,291 points. She had two Olympic gold medals and two World Championship gold medals in the heptathlon. She was considered the world's greatest female athlete.

Not since the 1984 Olympics, when she finished second by five points to Glynis Nunn of Australia, had anyone outscored Joyner-Kersey in a heptathlon that she finished.

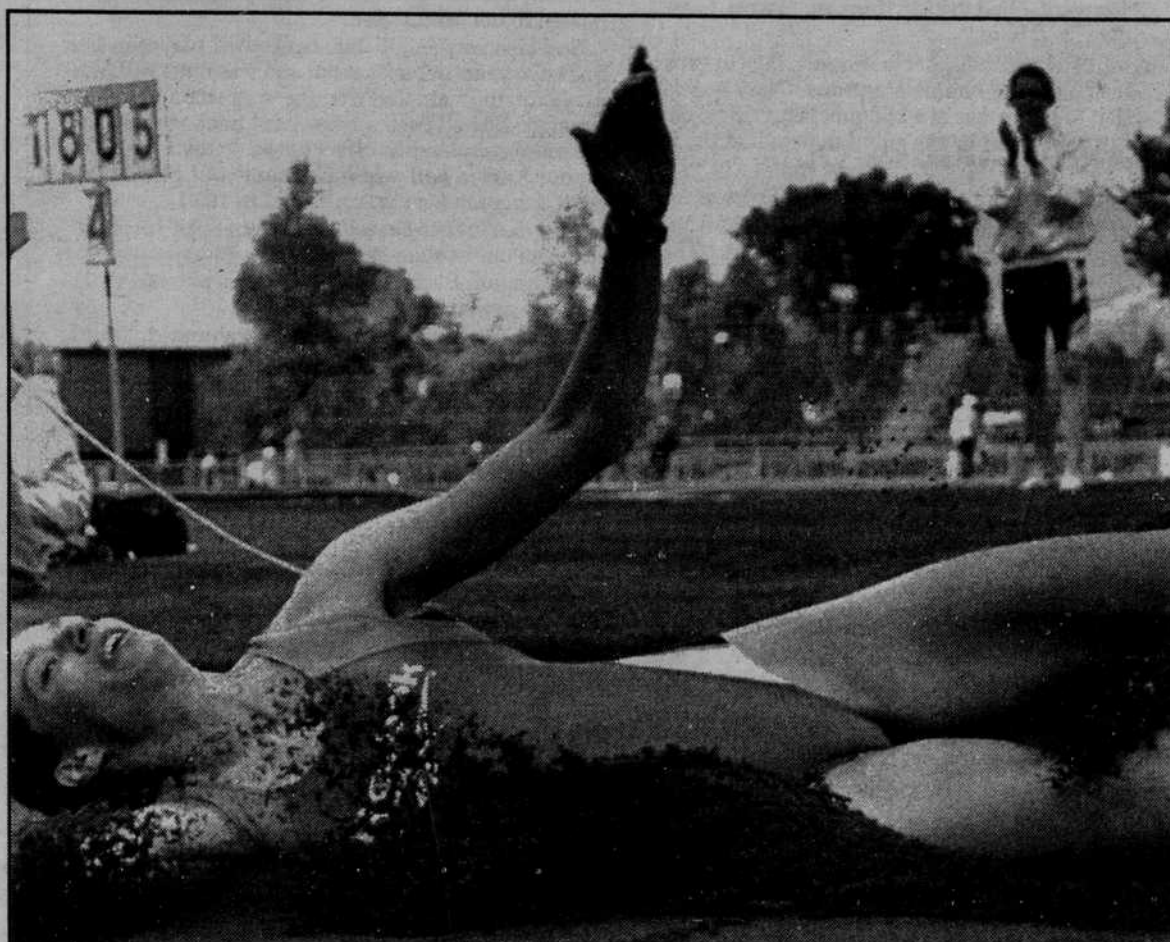
"When I was growing up, she was one of the people I admired," Kelly Blair said. "I wanted to be like her."

"If not for her, I would never have known what the heptathlon was. She was always so dominant."

"I remember seeing her for the first time in the 1984 Olympics. As the years went on, she became unbeatable. I always looked up to her."

Blair doesn't have to look up anymore. It's Joyner-Kersey who has to look up to Blair after the former Oregon All-American stunned the world record-holder at the U.S. Olympic trials.

Blair finished with a personal-best 6,406 points, edging Joyner-Kersey by three points. She also finished with a flourish, running the final event, the 800 meters, in 2 minutes, 12.23 seconds, more



MARK MCTYRE/Emerald

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Former Oregon heptathlete Kelly Blair hopes to repeat her Olympic trials upset at this month's Summer Games

These could be the Women's Games — in spirit, if not in fact

■ **OLYMPICS:** Women still can't earn medals in boxing, wrestling, water polo or weightlifting

(AP) — Aileen Riggins Soule remembers the way it was.

As a sinewy 14-year-old weighing 64 pounds, Soule — then just plain Aileen Riggins — won a gold medal in diving at the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, Belgium. At the time, the very notion of a female athlete was considered something of a contradiction. Women couldn't do that, people said. They were too delicate, too gentle, too — well, too ladylike.

"They thought swimming was too strenuous," Soule says now with the cackling scorn of someone who has strained for athletic achievement her entire life. These days, she has her eye on world records in swimming for the 90-plus age group, which she just entered. It wouldn't be smart to bet against her.

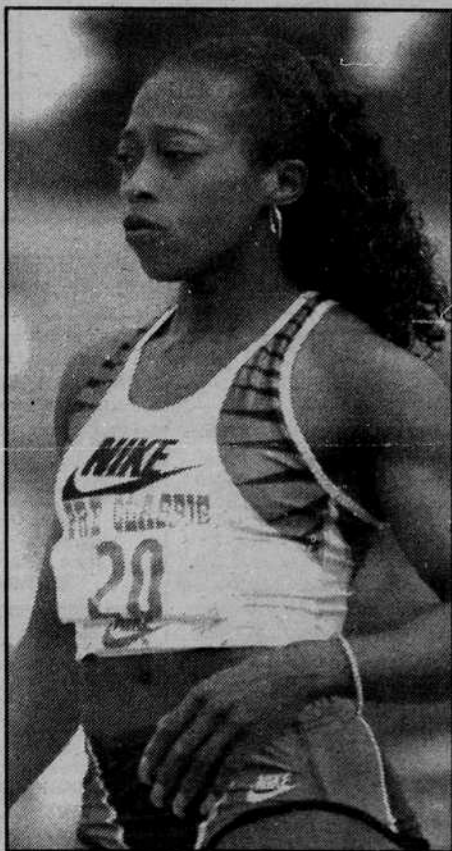
Too strenuous? How about Janet Evans churning her way like a human outboard through the 800-meter freestyle?

Too strenuous? How about Gwen Torrence burning rocket fuel through the 100 meters?

The world has changed. At this summer's Olympic Games in Atlanta, more women will compete than ever before, in more sports than ever before. Women athletes will be featured more prominently than ever in television coverage and advertisements. They will be the subject of a major historical retrospective in Atlanta. America's women athletes could well win more medals than the men, who still outnumber them. They surely will give the nation a new cast of heroines to treasure for years to come.

These, then, could be the Women's Games.

Just don't tell that to a member of the U.S. women's water polo team, who will have to watch the water polo competition — male only — from the sidelines. Don't tell it to women who wrestle or box. And don't tell it to Robin Goad, America's top woman weightlifter, who has won two gold medals



MARK MCTYRE/Emerald

Olympic sprinter Gwen Torrence is one of many female athletes who has gained the respect of her competitors and her audience.

at world weightlifting championships but won't be representing her country in Atlanta.

"I am the only American to set a world record in this sport in over 20 years and yet, because I am female, I will be denied the opportunity to lift in the Olympic Games," she said in a speech at the men's Olympic trials in April.

"I don't want to sound like some angry young female," she added. "But it is just time for things to be happening on this side."

They are, although doubtless not fast

enough for a 26-year-old athlete in a hurry. The truth is that the Olympic Games have made tremendous progress in moving toward equality for women, but they aren't there yet — and may never be.

A little historical perspective:

The modern Olympics began in 1896, with 245 male participants and exactly zero women, which is just the way most people — most male people — wanted it. Things didn't change much until the 1920s, when the universal suffrage movement began to spill over into sports.

The United States sent no women to the 1908 and 1912 Games, then sent a well-chaperoned delegation of 18 young women — alongside 331 men — to the 1920 Games in Antwerp. Plenty of Americans thought it was a bad idea. Then the women began to compete.

"Every time our girls went in, they broke a world's record," Soule recalled.

Ethelda Bleibtrey of the United States won gold medals in all three swimming events, and Soule took the gold in springboard diving. The U.S. women lost only one aquatic event — platform diving, a European specialty.

They came home to a tickertape parade.

The American women had performed spectacularly — those who could compete. But outside aquatics, women had few opportunities. Women were barred from track and field, gymnastics, all team sports. They could play tennis, swim or dive. And that was about it.

That began to change with the 1928 Olympics, in which women were admitted to track and field. From then on, women's participation grew slowly but steadily. By 1952, when the Soviet bloc and its cadre of pumped-up socialist women entered the Olympic movement, 10 percent of the athletes in the Olympics were women.

By 1972, women's participation had crept up to 14 percent. That year, the terrible year of terrorism at the Munich Games, a couple of things happened that opened the floodgates to women.

One was the passage in the United States of Title IX, guaranteeing educational op-

portunities for girls and women in this country.

The other was Olga Korbut.

Title IX virtually created intercollegiate athletics for women in the United States, providing a stream of trained athletes capable of competing in international competition. Furthermore, it was merely one part of an international women's movement that saw female athletes gaining ground throughout the Western world.

Korbut, the tiny Soviet gymnast whose bouncy athleticism and infectious smile became the sensation of the Munich Games, made television producers realize that there was an audience — a big audience — for women's sports.

After Korbut, the coverage grew more intense with each Olympics, until they became "a showpiece for women — almost the equal of men as far as viewers are concerned," according to John Lucas, a sports historian at Penn State University who specializes in the history of the Olympic Games.

In a study of NBC's coverage of the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, professors Catriona Higgs and Karen Weiller compared broadcasts of sports in which both men and women competed, and found that men received only slightly more air time — and this in a year when the men's basketball Dream Team dominated U.S. coverage.

Higgs and Weiller are sharply critical of the coverage — the NBC commentators, they complained, kept referring to female athletes by their first names, called them "girls" and repeatedly commented on their physical appearance. But they concede that "there was movement toward more positive and equitable coverage of women."

The fact is, the Olympics are the sole sporting event that is watched in nearly equal numbers by men and women, giving network producers a powerful incentive to cover women's events. This year, more than ever, television will target women as an Olympic audience.

That means more background stories about athletes' personal lives — and less

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