

THE DECATHLON ASSOCIATION

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REFLECTIONS ON ‘THE TRIALS’ An Exercise in both Joy and Anguish

Hello Again... So much has happened in the run-up to and in the aftermath of Ashton Eaton's new world record that I thought it would be useful to put something together about the historic two days at Hayward Field. This is soooo hard for me to put into perspective, being in the middle of it. So perhaps just some thoughts about anguish, some photos and quotes and a few random notes will help fill out the historical record. I want to come back and read this in 20 years.

Anguish:

What are the Trials about?

They are about the triumphs, the records, the joy of inclusion on the USA team, and more. But the decathlon trials are also cutthroat, and often filled with anguish.

Anguish.... you want anguish...the U.S. Olympic Trials are about, say the 1964 scenario...two Trials meets with three team spots available and Bill Toomey finishing 4th at both.

Or how about 1968. Former world record holder Russ Hodge, injured and dragging his bandaged leg around the South Lake Tahoe track in the last event, insisting on finishing. It took him 7 minutes and 8 seconds to complete the event. No team spot.

In the political boycott year of 1980 American athletes were told by President Jimmy Carter that no matter what happened at the Trials (in Eugene) that they would not go to the Moscow Games. Consider the distress of Bob Coffman, Fred Dixon and Lee Palles who went 1-2-3 but nowhere else.



World record holder Ashton Eaton (left) is congratulated by Olympic champion Bryan Clay.

Then there was Fred Dixon in 1984, failing in his bid for a 3rd Olympic team with a vault no height, and packing his family into a car and heading home, down the LA Freeway, only to turn around 30 minutes later and rush back to the Coliseum in time to catch the last flight of the javelin, run the 1500m *and then* retire, having completed his final decathlon. His story may sound all too familiar.

The tale of 1992 Trials in New Orleans is well worn. World champion Dan O'Brien missing his opening bar in the vault during Reebok's "Dan or Dave: to be settled in Barcelona" marketing campaign. He had to wait another 4 years for redemption in Atlanta.

And the 2012 Trials at Hayward were no different. Here was reigning Olympic champ Bryan Clay, falling in the hurdles and

no marking in the discus but soldiering on to the finish. His decision to complete all ten events honored us all. But, oh did we feel for Bryan.

I guess that's why they are called "Trials."

Quotes:

Ashton Eaton

-1500m- "That last 600 meters, I wasn't running with my own legs," Eaton told the media after the event. "It was incredible. I



Although this may appear that Ashton Eaton had a convoy accompanied to the finish, in reality, Curtis Beach (left) stepped aside while Eaton and Joe Detmer (right) raced to the finish. Could there be anyone left who really believes that American decathletes don't run the 1500 meters?

don't care what anyone says, there is magic here. I felt it for 600 meters. It was so special."

-the event- "The great thing about this is, and not to pump my own tires, but I feel like I'm not maximized yet. I feel like I can still run faster, jump higher, which I think makes it special. Hopefully, going to London, I'll be welcomed into the decathlon community."

"I love the event and what it symbolizes because to me, it's my whole world and to be the best in my world makes me pretty happy."

The record- "comparing the world indoor and outdoor records, the indoor hept record is nice, but the decathlon WR is IT! And it could not have come at a better place than Eugene.

London-"I wanted it to be a special event because this is my home state, my hometown, my home university. And just from the start, I just wanted to perform well."

"Going into London, I'm not going to change a thing," Eaton said. "Clearly."

Vin Lanana (Uof O coach and meet director)
"That was pretty electrifying. Was it the best? It was for me. I kept it together throughout the events." (ed. note: your eyes weren't entirely dry, Vin)

Trey Hardee

-about competitive the event would be- "Going in I thought it would be pretty competitive, then Ash jumped 27 feet and I said...well, ok (with a smile and shrug). Hardee then said, "I'm just happy that, years from now, I'll be able to say, 'See that record? I was there. I got to see it. I got to talk to him.'"

-about his own performance he would say: "I guess I was a B+ yesterday and the only remaining question was my performance in the javelin. I had awesome help, awesome trainers, and we had a magic number we wanted to hit (50 meters) to make team, so I



closed my eyes and said, let's do it and it was further than we hoped and my elbow held up."

-about the confusion over the javelin mark which came up on the scoreboard (and I subsequently announced) as a foul, "yea, I ran over the the guy with the clipboard and asked what's going on? I said 'I want to protest' and he said everything was ok. So I was pretty stoked because my elbow was in one piece."

-about Ashton's record-"when they put this in the books I hope they put it in parenthesis or

asterisks to indicate how crummy the conditions were. Every athlete tries to act like that stuff doesn't bother them, but it does."

Bryan Clay

*-finishing all ten events-*After the 1500m Bryan said, "I didn't want to finish but thank



goodness my coaches made me finish. I knew I needed to finish. The last thing I wanted to do was look back and have my kids remember that I didn't finish the decathlon. The last thing you want to do as a role model is quit at something." (Bryan and wife Sarah, have three children).

The past and future...."You've always got young guys coming up behind you," he said. "I remember when I was that young kid, coming up at Roman (Sebrle) and Tomas (Dvorak, the other great Czech decathlete). In fact, I was talking to Ashton today after the meet. He was saying, 'Some kid is going to be coming after me.'"

Dan O'Brien

about Ashton-"He (Ashton) was in position for it (WR), and he went for it and there was no letdown. The most impressive thing was that he kept up his intensity in this weather"

"He just didn't let down," O'Brien said. "I don't know if I had been in the same position I would have run my guts out in the 1,500. But he absolutely went for it. That's what separates him. With that mindset and that ability, no one will be able to touch him."

Curtis Beach

-on the 1500m- "we talked about me as pacesetter before the race but Ashton said, 'go ahead and run your own race.' With a lap to go I didn't think he was going to get it (the record) but then he picked it up and with 50 meters to go I looked back and he was right there and so I said to (myself) that it would be right for him to win the race where he breaks the world record. It was a pretty much spur of the moment decision for me. It was a pretty gutsy race for him, a PR by 4 seconds, and frankly it was an honor to compete with him and learn from all the guys and emulate their mentality."

"As for my decathlon...it might have been one of the worst decathlon's I've had."

Rafer Johnson:

"I thought he showed some real courage. He hung in there and figured out a way to win. He was brilliant in everything he did."

Gray Horn

- about the weather. "we all have to deal with it...we were so cold all the time"

-getting started in the decathlon "I was in a USA junior program by age 10 and I remember being in multis and finishing 9th one time when there were 8 medals so I told myself, 'never again.'

Harry Marra

*-the world record-*leaning over to Eaton after pole vault. "You can get the record," he said. "The American record?" said Eaton. "No," said Marra. "The world record." Eaton looked at Marra, as cool as can be and said, "Let's go for it."

*-the 1500m-*Eaton and Marra had a plan. "Even pace for three laps," said Marra. "Run 69s for 1200 meters and then bring it home in 47 seconds."

With a great chance at the record
Eaton chased Detmer down the final straight
with a Hayward decibel level off the charts.

"It was like Joe was saying, 'Come on Ashton, catch me, catch me' and I was like, thank you, Joe."



Can you top this....Oregon Track Club hosting the US Olympic decathlon champions at Schnitzer Art Museum the day after the decathlon Trials...from left to right: Bryan Clay (2008), Dan O'Brien (1996), Bill Toomey (1968), Rafer Johnson (1960), Milt Campbell (1956) and Richard and Bill Thorpe, sons of Jim Thorpe (1912). Bruve Jenner missing.



Two of the three pictured have/had 45.68 400m skills.

Random Notes

....remember when it was said that America decathletes could not run the 1500 meters?

Before the Trials I thought that Ashton would likely break two of the individual world records....the 400 meters and the 110m hurdles. Instead he took out the the marks for the 100 meters (with a 10.21) and long jump (8.23m/27-0).

-when the skies opened up just minutes before the (delayed!!) 3rd section of the 400 meters Bill Toomey facetiously quipped... 'thank you, Lord.'

-U of Oklahoma assistant coach Chris Huffins was on hand to witness his name being

erased from all of the 100m record lists (WR, AR, OTR, MR). He lamented... 'I 'll never be mentioned again.'

What are the Trials about?

They are about the grace of a Bryan Clay, or the courage of a Trey Hardee or the class of an Ashton Eaton

They are about the triumphs, the joy, the records, the inclusion on the USA team, and more. But they are also cutthroat, and often filled with anguish. My moment....when Ashton Eaton, with a new world record in 2012, was congratulated by Bill and Richard Thorpe, the last son's of Jim Thorpe who won in the first Olympic gold medal (with a world record) in 1912. Here at Hayward....1912 to 2012, it was as if time had stood still. And maybe it had.

Photo Gallery



1500m start



Ashton with fiancée Brianne Theissen and mother Roslyn.



Eaton's final vault clearance at 5.30m/17-4 ½



Bryan Clay ponders hurdle accident.



A family portrait, 2012 version



The former and new world record holders, Dan O'Brien and Ashton Eaton.

Credit to: *Sports Illustrated, USA Today, Runners World, Austin Statesman, Flo Track* for quotes.

*Frank Zarnowski
June 25, 2012*