

# Handout #2 Field Champions

## Jackie Joyner-Kersey

Jackie Joyner-Kersey is one of track and field's most distinguished athletes. This multi-talented athlete owns 18 records. She currently holds the record for the long jump at twenty-three feet and nine inches. She is the first American woman to win a gold medal in the long jump and the first woman to earn more than 7,000 points in the heptathlon. She has won three gold, one silver, and one bronze Olympic medals. She also has held the world record for the heptathlon since 1986. Jackie is an accomplished athlete.



Joyner-Kersey started competing in the multiple events at the early age of 12, when coach George Ward of the East St. Louis Railers encouraged her to do well in everything. Seeing the 1975 television movie about Babe Didrikson, "Babe," inspired her to become a multi-eventer. Jackie played volleyball at Lincoln High School but excelled at basketball, where she helped her team win a state championship. Her team beat its opponents by an average of 52.8 points her senior year. Jackie turned down a track scholarship at UCLA in favor of a full ride in basketball. A four-year Bruins starter at forward, she earned All-America honors.

While the sport of basketball helped Jackie get her college education, it was track that made her famous. In 1988 she started the season as the World Record-holder in the heptathlon, undefeated since her loss in the Los Angeles Olympics. In Indianapolis at the Olympic Trials, she did even better: her 7215 tally broke the record by 57 points. In the long jump, she safely made the team on her first attempt, then chased the World Record: she came close, hitting 24-5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> on a wind-aided leap.

At the Olympics in Seoul, Jackie put together her best seven events ever. After straining a knee in the high jump, many worried about her finishing, let alone breaking her own World Record. "After the first day people wrote off the World Record," said her coach and husband. "They were people who don't know Jackie." The next day, she started off by breaking the Olympic Record for the long jump at 23 feet and 10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. In the final event, needing a 2:13.67 for the record, she broke her six-year-old previous record in running 2:08.51. The result, a heptathlon World Record of 7291, surpassed by just one point what Joyner-Kersey had secretly predicted in June.

In the long jump she came from behind on her fifth jump, setting an Olympic Record 24 feet 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches to beat East German Heike Drechsler for the gold.

In 1992 she again won both her events at the Olympic Trials. In the heptathlon, she did what she promised, producing just enough to qualify. Her 6695, her worst score in seven years, still won by more than 400 points. Her long jump performance of 23 feet 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches came on her first attempt. She passed the rest. Then she tried to make the team in the 100 hurdles, finishing 5th in her semi. Along the way she twisted an ankle, and banged a knee. Those injuries didn't stop her later in the year. At the Olympics in Barcelona she handily defeated challenger Sabine Braun of Germany in scoring 7044 in the heptathlon, a mark only she herself has bettered. In the long jump, however, things didn't go so well for the defending champ. She hit 23 feet 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches for bronze, falling three inches short of gold.

Joyner-Kersey has flourished in track despite severe problems with asthma and allergies. Sometime she uses an inhaler to help her get through competitions, and at the 1995 USA Championships she finished the heptathlon wearing a mask to strain out pollens. That was better than the alternative of going to the hospital after a competition, something that happened twice to Kersey in 1993.

When she was growing up, The Mary E. Brown Community Center was a haven for doing homework, playing sports or exploring arts and crafts. But budget cuts closed its doors in 1982, and it has since fallen into decay. Jackie Joyner-Kersey remembers the inspiration and care she got there, and wants to provide the same for the children in the neighborhood today. So she's leading the campaign to raise construction and endowment funds for a new center. Jackie will retire soon and concentrate full-time on her foundation's efforts to improve life in East St. Louis.

In a way, Jackie Joyner-Kersey has never stopped running. Not only does this amazing athlete hold the world record in the heptathlon, and is a three-time Olympic gold medalist, but now she's running a campaign to raise funds to build a brand-new recreational and educational facility for disadvantaged kids in her hometown of East St. Louis.



## Dick Fosbury

Dick Fosbury won a gold medal in the high jump at the 1968 Olympic Games. That he did it was important, but the way he did it may have been more important. The “Fosbury Flop,” a technique in which Fosbury turned his back to the bar before jumping over it, has been used by just about every high jumper since Fosbury. The “Flop” helped Fosbury break Olympic and American records in Mexico City with a jump of 7 feet 4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches.



It's called the Fosbury Flop, but the creator of today's standard high-jump technique says a more accurate name might be the Fosbury Fluke. At first Dick was a benchwarmer on his high school athletic teams. In 1963, as a gangly and slightly uncoordinated sophomore at Oregon's Medford High School he tried to master a high-jump scissors maneuver called the straddle. He couldn't get the hang of it, so his coach told him to improvise. In the bus on the way to a meet, Fosbury decided to try his own approach: he turned his back to the bar, then flipped his head and shoulders over first and jumped 5 feet 10 inches—surprising everyone, including himself. By the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, Fosbury had perfected the Flop. Still, stepping out on the field, he was so nervous he felt like he was “marching to the lions.” The stadium went silent during his winning jump of 7 feet 4 inches. “I knew I had it once I was past my hips,” he recalls. “My eyes were wide; they were spinning. I was ecstatic.”



After the Olympics, Fosbury returned to Oregon State, where he had earlier flunked out. “Having attention and success was difficult,” he recalls. “Coaches don't teach you how to be a winner, and I had a difficult time with that.” Ready or not, he was a talk show celebrity, but he was also a college kid worrying about bills (sponsors and a pro circuit were not post-Olympic perks back then). It was almost a blessing when his celebrity faded and he graduated with an engineering degree in 1972.

Still thin and gangly, Fosbury works out at the Sun Valley Athletic Club. Few of the regulars know his history. Recently, a local ski instructor was stunned to learn the identity of the gawky guy in the corner of the gym. “I can't believe I'm looking at an Olympic athlete's body,” the man said. “I don't feel so bad.”

## Bob Beamon

Bob Beamon was born on August 29, 1946, Jamaica, NY. He was orphaned before his first birthday and running with a rough Queens, N.Y., street gang by the time he entered his teens. “Most of my friends from the early years are no longer with us,” he states. What saved Beamon—who couldn’t read or write and was sent to a high school for troubled teens—was the encouragement of his grandmother and the high school coaches who recognized his long-jump ability. “They didn’t give up on me,” he says.



“My high school (in Jamaica) was a jungle,” he said. “You had to be constantly alert — ready to fight or run. If you joined one of the gangs, you might escape harm but you also might be in trouble the rest of your life. If you stayed decent, you stood a good chance of being clobbered every day. So I went hot and heavy for basketball — and I feel it saved me from being cut up. Basketball is big stuff in New York. If you’re good in it, everybody respects you. Nobody would want to ruin your shooting eye or your shooting arm.”

But it was track and field where Beamon would truly excel. Years of training led to one perfect moment at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. There, he was responsible for one of the most memorable singular moments in Olympic history. At age 22, he uncorked an Olympic long jump of 29 feet 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches in the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, which was so unimaginable, fellow competitor and previous world record co-holder Igor Ter-Ovanesyan of Russia turned to Lynn Davies of Great Britain and said, “Compared to this jump, we are as children.”

With the fourth jump of the first round of the long jump finals, Beamon obliterated the world record by 21 feet <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inch and set a standard Olympic legend Carl Lewis, among others, spent a dozen years and four Games trying in vain to better.

“When I heard the jump was over 29 feet, I remember saying to myself, ‘This is just a dream. I’m going to wake up pretty soon in a cold sweat.’” Beamon said. “I was actually touching myself to see if it was real.”

Whatever you do,  
don't do it halfway.

-- Bob Beamon

Beamon’s Olympic record still stands today as the oldest on the books. The world record stood for 22 years and 316 days until the United States’ Mike Powell bettered it by two inches at the 1991 World Championships

on a perfect night in Tokyo.

To add some perspective to Beamon's feat, which introduced the now trademarked phrase "Beamonesque" into sports vocabulary, consider this: in the 33 years since Jesse Owens' long jump of 26 feet 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches in 1935, the world record had crept ahead only eight and a half inches. Beamon added another 21<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. An Olympic jump of even 28 feet wasn't recorded until 12 years later in 1980 and Beamon himself never again jumped as much as 27 feet in competition.

His passion and talent for abstract art (he won second place in an artwork competition in Barcelona, Spain, recently) has led to the "Bob Beamon Neckwear Collection," a line of neckwear patterned with his artwork. And there's negotiations currently to turn his biography, "Keep Going Till You Get It Right - The Bob Beamon Story," which was authored by his wife, Milana, into a television movie. He even has his own web site at [www.bbeamon.com](http://www.bbeamon.com).

Bob's motto is "Never stop feeling positive about yourself."

A long-time resident of Miami, Florida, where he works for the Metro Dade Parks Department, Beamon has dedicated his life to helping underprivileged youngsters.



**Up, Up and Away: Beamon Flies Into the Record Books**