

A LOOK AT THE U.S. DISTANCE TEAM OLYMPIC REPORT CARD

By DON SIKORSKI
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The United States Track and Field team went to Beijing with great expectations. Walking away with a grand total of 23 Olympic medals, the Track and Field team's result, while mixed, adequately measured up. Here's a look at the performance results and the distance running report card for the U.S. team from the 2008 Olympic Games:

Women's 1,500m: Shannon Rowbury (Final, 7th, 4:03.58), Christin Wurth-Thomas (Heats, 8th, 4:09.70), Erin Donohue (Heats, 8th, 4:16.05) - Rowbury, as displayed during her dominant Trials effort in Eugene, was the clear contender of the U.S. group. Her 7th place finish in the final was a strong representation from the U.S. team. Christin Wurth-Thomas and Erin Donohue were both eliminated in their Heats, each finishing 8th in their respective races. **Grade = C+**

Men's 1,500m: Bernard Lagat (Heats, 6th, 3:37.79), Lopez Lomong (Heats, 12th, 3:41.00), Leonel Manzano (Heats, 12th, 3:50.33) - The marquee event of Track and Field has always been the mile. It's metric near-equivalent, the 1,500 meters, has historically produced dramatic finishes and legendary champions. However, the 2008 Olympic 1,500 meter final would have no Bernard Lagat, the 2007 World Champion and one of the Olympic favorites to repeat that performance in Beijing. There would be no Lopez Lomong, no Leonel Manzano, and no Alan Webb. With all three American runners eliminated during their heats, the only reason for a passing grade is that little was expected of Lomong and Manzano, both young talents that should be back in 2012. **Grade = D**

Women's 5,000m: Kara Goucher (Final, 9th, 15:49.39), Shalane Flanagan (Final, 10th, 15:50.80), Jennifer Rhines (Final, 14th, 16:34.83) - With all three U.S. runners earning a spot in the Olympic Final, the performance of the Kara Goucher, Shalane Flanagan, and Jen Rhines has to be considered a success. Nothing dramatic here; just three solid race efforts. **Grade = A-**

Men's 5,000m: Bernard Lagat (Final 9th, 13:26.89), Matt Tegenkamp (Final, 13th, 13:33.13), Ian Dobson (Heats, 9th, 14:05.47) - Lagat, as 2007 World Champion at both 1,500 and 5,000 meters, was expected to challenge Ethiopian superstar Kenenisa Bekele, the 10,000 meter gold medalist in Beijing, at the 5K distance. That battle never materialized, with Bekele dominant and Lagat a distance 9th in the final. Matt Tegenkamp ran well in Beijing to earn a place in the competitive final and, with his personal best approaching the 13 minute mark, is a promising hope for the future. Ian Dobson was eliminated in the heats with a 9th place finish. While Lagat's performance was a disappointment, Tegenkamp's effort keeps the grade promising. **Grade = B-**

Women's 10,000m: Shalane Flanagan (3rd, 30:22.22), Kara Goucher (10th, 30:55.16), Amy Begley (26th, 32:38.28) - There is no way anyone could have watched Shalane Flanagan's performance in the 10,000 meter race and not been proud of the American athletes. While Flanagan cleanly benefits from a terrific gene pool (Dad Steve hails from nearby Brooklyn, CT and was a former standout at the University of Connecticut and Mom is a former national class distance runner), it was all effort, hard work, and an intelligent race plan that earned Flanagan the bronze medal. Kara Goucher, also doubling (5,000-10,000m) in Beijing, posted a strong 10th place finish. And Amy Begley, who had dramatically dipped under the "A" standard with her 3rd place finish at the Trails in Eugene, ran a very respectable race. **Grade = A-**

Men's 10,000m: Galen Rupp (13th, 27:36.99), Abdi Abdirahman (15th, 27:52.53), Jorge Torres (25th, 28:13.53) - Is Galen Rupp, at the early age of 22, the future of American distance running on the track? Although the ghost of fellow Oregon alum Steve Prefontaine remains an image that Rupp has yet to reach, his strong 13th place performance in the 10,000 meter race in Beijing was certainly promising. Abdi Abdirahman was right in the mix as well, finishing 15th. Jorge Torres would follow 21 seconds later in 25th against an extremely competitive field. **Grade = B**

Women's Marathon: Blake Russell (27th, 2:33:13), Deena Kastor (DNF), Magdalena Lewy-Boulet (DNF) - A strong effort from Blake Russell (27th in 2:33:13) gives the U.S. women's marathon team helps offset the bad luck of her teammates to earn a passing grade. Both Deena Kastor, the silver medalist from the 2004 Olympic Games, and Magdalena Lewy-Boulet, who had led almost the entire U.S. Trials race before Kastor took over the late stages, failed to finish in Beijing. Kastor was a victim of bad luck; a foot injury forced her out just 5 kilometers into the race. Lewy-Boulet was out just before halfway due to a painful right knee. **Grade = D**

Men's Marathon: Dathan Ritzenhein (9th, 2:11:59), Ryan Hall (10th, 2:12:33), Brian Sell (22nd, 2:16:07) - While some may have expected Hall to be a legitimate threat to win it all, the performances of Dathan Ritzenhein (who moved up to 9th), Hall (10th) and Brian Sell (22nd despite struggling in the late miles) measures up to anyone. Ritzenhein, in just his 3rd attempt at the distance, was especially promising, and if he remains healthy, can certainly be a threat in the future. Ditto for Hall. And both have the youth, talent, and the will to be there. Sell's blue collar effort is an inspiration and shows what 160 miles per week of training can do to a runner that couldn't break 10 minutes for 23 miles in high school. **Grade = A-**

Olympic Recap

Some final miscellaneous thoughts on the 2008 Olympic Games:

- Michael Phelps is clearly now on plane with Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods in terms of an athlete that dominates his sport. He walked away with an all total Phelps is rumored to consume approximately 120,000 calories per day. The trick is that he also burns approximately 12,000 calories per day as well.
- Rule #1 to remember if you are one of the favorites to medal in the 4 x 100 meter relay: practice your baton handoffs. The U.S. medal count would have easily been greater if this ritual could have been executed. Ditto for the Jamaican ladies.
- Parity has continued to develop at the Olympic Games. 87 different countries earned medals in Beijing, a new record total surpassing the old mark of 80 in 2000. And five countries won their very first Olympic medal.
- If the air quality is so poor in Beijing, how do we explain 21 year old Kenyan Sammy Wanjiru clocking in at 2 hours, 6 minutes, and 32 seconds, breaking a 24 year-old Olympic record by nearly 3 minutes? And if the answer is youth, how do we explain Morocco's Jaouad Gharid earning a silver medal (2:07:16) at age 36?
- The U.S. Men's Basketball team, tagged by the media as the "Redeem Team", avoided all criticisms by bringing home the gold from Beijing. The NBA thanks them for that.
- Jamaica's Usain Bolt could have easily run faster in the 100 meters than his world record 9.69 if he wanted to. I thought only long distance races featured the option of slowing down and celebrating before reaching the finish line. But at no time did I find his finish line celebration to be excessive or insulting to his competition. Usain Bolt likes to run. And Usain Bolt is the fastest man on the planet (to our knowledge). He has never been disrespecting of his opponents, and Bolt's 100 and 200 meter wins, next to Phelps' heroics in the water, were arguably the performance of the entire Olympic Games.
- Looking for a sport that requires outstanding athleticism, strength, size, speed, conditioning, endurance, teamwork, and strategy? My vote goes to two person beach volleyball. Great wins by both the United States Men's and Women's team in Beijing.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@sbcglobal.net.