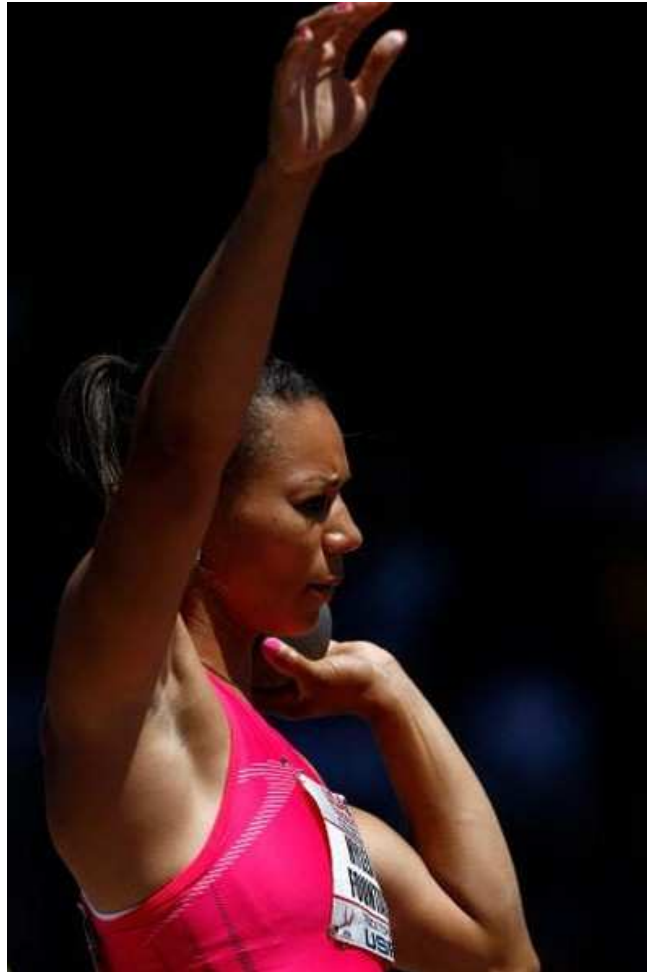


US Heptathlon Championships Hayward Field, Eugene, Oregon

Sunday, 28 June 2009

Fountain scores a PB 4038 to forge a big lead - US Heptathlon Champs, Day 1



Hyleas Fountain shot putting in the Heptathlon at the 2009 US Champs (Getty Images)

Eugene, USA - Hyleas Fountain may have silently let it be known that she is no longer satisfied being the second-best heptathlete on the planet. Competing in her first full **Heptathlon** of the year, the Beijing silver medallist roared to a lifetime-best first-day total of 4038 to lead the event after Saturday's events at the **US Championships** - a competition which offers points scoring opportunities in the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge**.

Although perhaps not as dramatically as with the 12.65sec Hurdle race with which she started her title run in last year's US Olympic Trials, Fountain nonetheless made a strong opening statement here with a 12.90 clocking in the **100m Hurdles** for 1140 points. All of the top hurdlers were clustered in the third of five heats, but the 0.9 wind pushing them was nothing compared with some of the gusts which propelled the decathletes in the sprints the previous two days.

Gi-Gi Johnson was next across the line with 13.14 (1103), followed by USC student Nia-Sifaatihii Ali in 13.33 (1075) and Diana Pickler at 13.43 (1060).

In the **High Jump**, Fountain leaped 1.87m, a height she had exceeded only twice before in her career and a notable improvement on her 1.81 at the Olympic Trials. The resulting two-event score of 2207 - 38 points ahead of her personal-best pace from last year - gave her a gap of 97 ahead of Sharon Day, who led all competitors with 1.90 for a second-place total of 2110.

Pickler's 1.81 was her best in the last two years, and it pulled her into third with an aggregate 2051, while Ali plummeted to a distant fourth with 1954 after her 1.72 best.

Johnson, not ordinarily a strong high jumper, was even more off the mark with 1.60 as she slid from second to ninth with 1839.

Fountain then had her most significant mark of the day with a superb PB 13.81m (previous was 13.38) in the **Shot Put**. It gave her a total of 2988 after three events which compares with 2920 at the same point in the Trials last year.

Day managed to barely hold second at 2821 with a 12.75m effort, as Pickler closed in with a massive PB 13.49 (up from 12.58!) for a composite 2811 in third.

Ali's 2656 stayed in fourth place with a 12.61 release, as Bettie Wade moved into the top five with 2643 after a PB 13.98, the day's best performance.

In the session-ending **200 metres**, Fountain may have been slightly hampered by her lane-three assignment, but she handled it well. Coming off the curve, she had a five-metre lead and hit the finish in 23.29sec to end with her best-ever first-day total of 4038. By comparison, she ended the first day of last year's Olympic Trials with 3968.

Running in an outside lane in Fountain's section, Pickler ran 24.25 and went to the intermission with a distant-second 3768. Day's 24.66 resulted in 3739 for third, while Ali remained far back in fourth with 3621 after her 24.16 race.

"I don't really have a target score here," Fountain said moments after the sprint, but she still acknowledged she had experienced a career first day. "If it (a PB) happens, it happens. I'm taking it one event at a time."

"Last night was the best I've ever slept before a competition, so I felt I was ready to go," she reported. "The hurdle time wasn't a PB, but I haven't really raced that much this year. There haven't been so many meets for me to go to without heading to Europe."

And about the big PB on her last attempt in the Shot Put? "It was a slow start there. But on the last one, I knew what I needed to do."

With that, Fountain bade farewell to the media and went to the full-body ice bath.

Ed Gordon for the IAAF

US Heptathlon Championships Hayward Field, Eugene, Oregon

Monday, 29 June 2009

Injured Fountain abandons, title goes to Pickler with 6290 – US Heptathlon Champs, Day 2



Diana Pickler on the way to the US Heptathlon title in Eugene (Getty Images)

Eugene, USA - In the big shock of Sunday in Eugene, Hyleas Fountain was forced out of the **Heptathlon** competition at the **US Championships** - a competition which offers points scoring opportunities in the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge** - after five splendid events which had at one time pointed toward an eventual total in the 6900 range.

The Beijing silver medallist had injured her neck in Saturday's High jump competition, and her extreme effort in jumping 6.95 in Sunday's Long Jump further aggravated the condition. Medical personnel took Fountain away from Hayward Field on a stretcher to a waiting ambulance for transfer to a local hospital for further evaluation.

Diana Pickler, with a PB total of 6290, captured the US crown, with Sharon Day - already on the Berlin team in the High Jump - at 6177 and Bettie Wade with 5908 taking the next two places.

Even without Fountain, the US will send a full Heptathlon team to Berlin, as both Pickler and Day achieved the "A" standard today (6100), and Wade slipped in under the "B" standard (5900).

Fountain was the second major casualty in the combined events at the US Championships, as Olympic champion Bryan Clay withdrew from the Decathlon shortly before the start of competition Thursday with a strained hamstring. Lacking two Olympic medallists, the US team will go to Berlin in a decidedly weakened state so far as the combined events are concerned.

Until the moment of abdication today, Fountain continued to rule the event. She kept up her powerful pace from the first day with a 6.95 leap in the **Long Jump** to amass a five-event 5193 total. After a leadoff foul, the Beijing silver medallist flew out to a distance previously only attained by Jackie Joyner Kersee among US multi-eventers. Satisfied with this PB improvement (from 6.88 at last year's Olympic Trials), Fountain then appeared to take a rest to prepare for the javelin. But in reality, her injured neck required professional attention.

Pickler had meanwhile maintained her hold on the runner-up spot with a 6.33m windy leap (her legal PB is 6.20) for an aggregate 4721. The battle for the final team spot began to take on added interest with only two events remaining. Day managed a near-PB 5.99 for a 4585 total,

but Michigan student Wade jumped a career-best 6.41 for 4530 to move within 55 points of a potential Berlin nomination.

Now, without Fountain guiding the competition, Pickler took over the top spot after the **Javelin Throw** with 5425 after a 41.90, as Day moved into the runner-up position, trailing by 161 points at 5264 after a 40.62 fling. A tie for the third spot emerged at 5076 points between Lela Nelson and Wade after their efforts of 36.63 and 33.74, respectively.

With 300 metres remaining in the **800 metres**, Day took charge and crossed the line first in 2:13.54, a personal best by more than 3½ seconds. Pickler, safely atop the point totals, still ran competitively in fifth with 2:16.99, the second-fastest two-lap race of her career, while Wade won the all-important battle with Nelson, 2:19.37 to 2:20.15, both PBs.

But all the while, one can only imagine what Fountain might have attained had misfortune not dogged her this weekend. In the last 13 years, only Carolina Klüft, with 7032 in her Osaka victory and 6952 in winning the Athens' gold, has scored more than 6900 points.

Ed Gordon for the IAAF