

Huge PR Improvement For Bryant

by Jon Hendershott

Noah Bryant went to Fayetteville with a grand total of one indoor meet under his belt this winter. "And I went to that just to get a qualifying mark," he says of his January 63-11¼ (19.50) in Albuquerque.

Meanwhile, Idaho's Russ Winger had led collegians all winter, reaching a 65-5 (19.98) leader the week before the NCAA. Bryant, 22, headed in as the No. 4 seed after Winger, Arizona State's Ryan Whiting (65-3¼/19.89) and NC State's Russell Pope (64-8¾/19.73).

But the USC senior felt the same way that Trojan head man Ron Allice and throws coach Dan Lange felt: he was ready. "We don't push indoors, but Noah had looked great in both throwing and weight workouts," says Allice.

So the 6-¾/265 Bryant opened with an all-conditions PR of 64-10 (19.76) to stand 2nd after the first three rounds, trailing Whiting's career best 65-7¾ (20.01), while Winger languished in 8th at 62-2¼ (18.95).

Before the final three rounds, Lange talked with his pupil. "Noah had been solid but he hadn't really hit one," the coach recalls.

Bryant replied simply, "Coach, I got this."

Then in round 4, he exploded to a mighty 67-5¼ (20.55) to take the lead for good—not only in the NCAA competition but also as the farthest putter in USC history.

Not shabby, considering the likes of WR setters and/or Olympic champions Dallas Long, Parry O'Brien, Moose Thompson and Bud Houser have worn the scarlet and gold.

Bryant recalls, "I just knew what I had to do since I hadn't really hit either my second or third throws. I wanted to win, sure, but even more I wanted to focus on myself. Throw the way I knew I could, how I had thrown in practice all year. After I did it, I was pretty happy."

Winger showed his own competitiveness as he powered a PR 67-4 (20.52) in frame 5 but it wasn't quite enough. Says Bryant, "An NCAA championship is something I've always wanted. It's my biggest meet so far."

And of being atop USC's all-time list, Bryant admits, "It's pretty cool. So many great throwers have gone through USC. It's a tremendous

honor to even be on the same list with all those great names."

Bryant is lucky to even be throwing. As a soph in the spring of '05, he threw a hammer at a meet and had the chain-link cage catapult the ball back into his face.

"I got my right hand up, which may have saved my life," he says. The

ball shattered cheek bones near his right eye socket; "11 or 12 pieces," he says. "On x-rays, you could see almost perfectly the shape of the hammer ball." Adds Allice, "The doctors said Noah's cheek looked like a broken egg shell."

In a marathon 4-hour surgery, doctors put in screws to repair the cheek bones and inserted a silicon prop to hold Bryant's right eye in its socket. He says, "The screws are still in there. I don't want to go through another surgery just to take them out. But they're small enough that I don't set off metal detectors at the airport."

A changed Bryant resumed training in the fall of '05. "He came back with more discipline than ever," says Lange. "He didn't take anything for granted anymore. I think the accident made him realize that it all could be taken away in a moment."

"I always worked hard," Bryant relates, "but I came back even more determined than ever. I knew I wasn't indestructible."

Last outdoor season, he pushed his shot best out to 64-6½ (19.67) in winning the Pac-10 and placed 7th in the NCAA at 63-3¼ (19.28). He even set a hammer best of 203-5 (62.01).

"Noah just got back on the horse. That's the kind of kid he is," says Allice.

Adds Bryant, "At my first meet, I felt kinda nervous for my first hammer throw. But I just told myself to forget about it. It's over."

Naturally, Bryant looks ahead to even bigger things outdoors although he says, "I'm not putting a number

on it. I just know I'll definitely improve once my training peaks."

Lange adds, "There's a lot more in there for Noah. We avoid thinking of any specific distance and just focus on what helps him to throw far."

Bryant concurs: "I know I can throw well at big meets. It's there; I just have to let it happen naturally."

Bryant added almost a meter to his old shot best and was over it on four of his six throws



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