

Joy Inniss' Most Outstanding Performance

In 1992, the outdoor MAC championship was contested in Toledo, Ohio. For this meet, Joy Inniss, just a sophomore, was contested in 5 events: the long jump, the triple jump, the 200m, the 400m, and the 1600m relay. On Friday, the first day of the meet, the finals of the long jump was contested, and she placed 2nd with a jump of 19'6". During that first day, she also qualified for the semis in the 400m and 200m.

I spent most of the second day agonizing over the triple jump, her best event, because she was absent during most of that event. After two jumps in the prelims, she had to dash away for the 400m semis and finals. Our strategy was for her to get off a big jump early and put the event out of reach for the competition. On her second jump of the prelims, she bounded out over 41 feet. We felt that that jump should win the meet so she dashed off to the 400m final, passing her final prelim jump. While Joy lined up and competed in the 400m, to my shock and horror, a competitor bounded to a big PR, surpassing Joy's mark and moving her into second place. I sent one of her teammates rushing to retrieve her. "Joy, you are on deck and in second place, you have to jump, now," I urged! Joy explained that she didn't have time to jump, she had to run the 200m final and they were getting into the starting blocks directly in front of us. I told her, "jump now or you will be too exhausted after the 200m! We had trained for just this situation. In numerous training sessions I had asked her to visualize being behind with just one jump left. In these training sessions she was only allowed eight steps during her approach and during these mental training sessions she often responded by surpassing her imaginary competitors with a training PR, so I knew she could do it. However, this time the mock competition was real and the gravity of the situation was great; the MAC championship could be determined by the outcome of her performance.

Without further questioning my directives, she raced onto the runway searching for her approach marker, but to her horror she found that someone had removed it. Ignoring this major complication, which would have demoralized a lesser athlete, instinctively Joy chose a new starting point and without hesitation raced down the runway. As she neared the take-off board, she readjusted her stride pattern, which caused a slight stutter-step. Regardless, there was no hesitation as her take-off foot attacked and she pounded the board. In the air she appeared to hang suspended during each phase, the hop..., the step..., and the jump..., and as she landed in the sand pit the judge's green flag flew up, signaling a fair jump. However, there was no time to look back; she leaped out of the sand pit and into the starting blocks. Bang, and she was off around the curve of the 200m finals, her forth event of the meet. I swung back toward the triple jump official just in time to see him posting the last digit of the jump distance. I was stunned, 42' $\frac{3}{4}$ ", a new school and MAC conference record. Now I knew we were safe. I knew that none of her competitors could rise to that level.

Again, I spun back toward the finish line just in time to see the 200m finalists cross the finish line. I could hear the crowd roar and see Joy crossing in 3rd place with a PR of 24.37s. However, there was no time to celebrate, just an hour later she was competing in her 5th event of the meet handing off the baton on the winning 1600m Relay team. By the end of the meet Joy—just a sophomore—had competed in five events and had scored two 3rd place finishes and three 1st place finishes with a PR in the 200m and a school and conference record in the triple jump. I had just witnessed what I believe to be one of the most remarkable all around performance in MAC history, and the coaches and officials also must have recognized how extraordinary her performances had been because they awarded her the trophy for the most valuable performer of the meet. However, for Joy Inniss it was all in a day's work.