

Conference Collision

Tension filled the spring air. Excitement blended with nervousness and intensity. Beaded sweat fell from my face and my expressions were as fierce as ever; it was no mystery I was feelin' it. My first three discus throws had been the best of the night, by anyone. Those were also my best in a month; my confidence was on high. The date was May 15, 2009. The event was the Allen County Athletic Conference Track & Field Championships.

As my warm up tosses soared through the crisp, spring air I knew they were good. I didn't know until my first official, measured throw how good they actually were. I kept warming up, giving much detail to my footwork in the ring. My confidence continued to climb. I had been worried all week because we weren't able to practice outside much, due to rain. But as the disc continued to fly perfectly out of my hand on my last warm up attempt, it seemed everything was going well. Everything was just the way I wanted it. Oh how that all changed so very quickly. I look over to see a crowd of people talking to a fellow thrower, that fellow thrower just happened to be Geoff G_____.

Geoff G_____ was a junior from Garrett High School. Geoff and I had become friends through track and football. That winter I had seen Geoff at a throwing camp I attended, and he seemed to have gotten immensely bigger. His arms and shoulders seemed to triple in size, but I never thought much about it. He told me that he practiced a lot over the summer and had high goals. I never thought anything of this. Until I read in the paper Geoff was winning meets with throws of 160+. Since my personal best was 155, which just happens to be the school record, it concerned me a bit.

I'd recalled a text I'd received from Geoff saying he had broken his foot, while throwing. He told me all about this black boot that he was forced to wear on his foot at all times, obviously not making him very mobile. Feeling sympathetic but at the same time excited (it sounds bad, but come on, many would feel the same way) I started to ponder the discus throwers in the conference. There was no one besides him that was any competition to me. No one at all!

Well as I walked over to Geoff by his team's tent, I saw the huge protective black boot over his right foot. Geoff had already informed me he was going to throw at conference, but I was still unconvinced he would be able to throw well at all, with the conditions of his foot. Only time would tell I guess. As I walked into the ring for my first official attempt, I felt as though I was barely able to stand straight. Shaky were my steps entering into position. Geoff's presence in the discus had been in the back of my mind for two months, and I now was sure that people could tell. My body is in sync and firing on all cylinders. My right foot swung to the center of the ring as I went into orbit with my spin. My yell was heard by all, and my release was as smooth as butter. "Mark!" I step down from the ring and wait anxiously by the tape to see how far my first throw was. "One hundred and fifty feet." I was ecstatic, my best throw in a month! What a huge way to start the night. Stay focused, keep loose, get a good sweat going, those were all the thoughts going through my scattered mind at that moment. Geoff threw right after me, since we were the first and second seeds. Nervously watching, wondering, waiting, I stood by my dad to see just how well he could move and compete on that foot!

Conference Collision, *continued*

The crowd was silent; curious minds wondered the same thing I did, how far was he going today? As Geoff began his spin, I could tell he was in pain by the way he pivoted on his bum foot. Geoff released the disc and it flew out of bounds miserably. I couldn't help but to smile. My second attempt had been another good throw but not as far as the first. Much to my pleasure Geoff repeated his performance on his second throw, scratching once again. With my confidence rising and smile growing, I stepped into the ring for my third attempt. With my roar comes a huge throw, one hundred and fifty one feet. Everything seemed to be going my way as I blissfully ran out to retrieve my discus. It's Geoff's last throw, if he doesn't get one in bounds he won't advance to the finals, therefore have no way of placing in the conference. He steps in and looks out at the field. He took a power throw. Landing in bounds, they mark his throw at 140 feet, no big deal.

Going into the finals I was seeded first and Geoff second, which means I would throw very last and Geoff would be before me. As others warmed up for the finals with more throws, I made myself at home in the parking lot doing sprints and stretches to keep warm and loose. Music jamming ear to ear, I was focused, ready, and intense.

Four songs and two throws later, we hit the main event of the night. With less than spectacular throws initially, I was still in first and increased my best to one hundred and fifty two. Geoff's two throws both missed the mark and flew out of bounds. The time came. Geoff and I had the last two throws of the whole meet. He would go first and I would follow him. Geoff stepped in the ring and I still felt very comfortable about how things had been playing out. He flew through the ring as quick as lightning and released the disc. The disc flew... and flew... and flew. "Mark", said the judge. Much to my dismay I was already aware his throw was far better than mine. "One hundred and sixty nine feet," read the judge. My heart dropped. My dream crumbled. My hope...gone.

I took my last throw knowing it would take a miracle for me to win. The throw landed somewhere around one hundred and fifty feet. I dismally walked to retrieve my discus. I knelt to the ground acting like I was untying my shoes, and a few tears rolled down my cheeks. Behind me the frenzied news-crew swarmed over Geoff. He'd broken the ACAC conference record by five feet.

I walked around by myself reflecting on all the time and hard work I had put into the track season. I heard the announcer call all the discus finalists to the podium; I was annoyed. I didn't want the red ribbon that was rightfully mine, it wasn't good enough. I was only the best loser, losing is not an option. It never has been; it never will be. As I stepped up onto the podium and took my ribbon I thought of all the invitationals I had won and all the meets I had dominated. Sure I felt accomplished and proud, but the strongest feeling I had was none of those things. That feeling was the one that had Geoff G_____ in my sights for the whole next year. I'm going to beat him, you can count on it.