

PA Athlete Profile: Triple Jumper Danylle Kurywchak



By Bob Burns

Improvement in the triple jump is usually measured in centimeters or inches. That's what made Danylle Kurywchak's performance at last month's USATF Indoor Championships so unusual. She improved her lifetime best by nearly two feet to claim second place in her first appearance on the big stage.

Kurywchak hopped, stepped and jumped down the runway at the Albuquerque Convention Center before landing 44 feet away from the takeoff board. The Baylor graduate exceeded her previous best of 42-2¼ on four of her jumps, backing up the 44-footer with earlier jumps of 43-5, 42-5¼ and 43-11¼.

"That night I just remember laughing about how crazy life is," Kurywchak said. "I can't wait to live the rest of it."

She probably received some assistance from Albuquerque's 5,312-foot elevation, but not two feet worth of assistance. Regardless, Kurywchak wasted little time in showing that her USATF performance wasn't a fluke. She jumped 44-6¼ at the Warrior Open in Turlock and followed that win with another victory at the Stanford Invitation, where she hit 43-10.

Lest any of this go to her head, Kurywchak lives at home with her parents and younger brother in Cameron Park and trains by herself at her alma mater, Ponderosa High School. She recently started a full-time job as a project manager for a Telehealth company.

“You don’t make much money jumping into sand,” she said.

Kurywchak jumped 37-6 as a Ponderosa High School junior to qualify for the California state meet. She improved to 38-2 as a senior but fell short of qualifying for the state meet.

When it came to selecting a college, Kurywchak went through her collection of commemorative state quarters and being taken by the bison on the back of the North Dakota coin. Sure enough, she landed at the University of Mary, a Division II school in Bismarck, N.D.

“I really liked the idea of getting to compete indoors,” said Kurywchak, whose ancestry is Ukrainian and Brazilian. “So I went to the tundra to do it.”

Her first breakthrough came in 2015, when as a University of Mary junior she topped 40 feet indoors and improved to 42-2¼ outdoors. Kurywchak earned Division II All-American honors indoors and out – and began seeing her abilities in a new light. She decided to transfer to a Division I program.

“Being a big fish in a small pond was fun,” Kurywchak said. “I even enjoyed the cold. But I really wanted to be a great triple jumper, and I knew I needed more time with a coach. I also wanted to make sure the program I picked had other jumpers – better jumpers than me.”

Kurywchak was intrigued by Alabama, but Southeastern Conference rules would have forced her to sit out a year. At Baylor, she’d be eligible to compete immediately. She’d also be coached by Stacey Smith, whose 46-1¼ jump from 1999 remains the Baylor school record.

A broken foot at the beginning of the 2016 indoor season got Kurywchak off on the wrong foot at Baylor. Though she did manage to qualify for the NCAA regional meet in May, it was mostly a lost season.

“Danylle just needed a little more time and training,” Smith said. “I’m not really surprised by how she’s jumping now. She’s very raw and has great potential. I’m really excited to see how far she can go.”

Kurywchak graduated from Baylor in December with a degree in Health, Kinesiology and Leisure Studies. Smith continues to coach her from afar, communicating primarily through text messages. Ponderosa does have a quality track facility, and she’s less lonely now that the high school team is working out each day.

“It’s kind of primitive, but it works,” Kurywchak said. “I’m glad I had the experience I had at University of Mary. Division II athletes learn not to feel entitled, which is a plus in my situation. I don’t even have a bathtub to soak in. I walk around with zip-lock bags in my socks.”

Kurywchak was the ninth-seeded jumper in Albuquerque, but she was encouraged when she completely missed her opening jump and still went 41-11¼, just three inches off her lifetime best. She got better as the competition progressed, hitting her longest effort in the sixth and final round.

“I didn’t even know it was 44 feet until afterward,” she said. “I’m not the best with metric conversions.”

Not long ago, Kurywchak went online to find out where the USATF Outdoor Championships would be held this summer. When she saw that the national meet would be in Sacramento, just 30 miles east of Cameron Park, she took it as another sign that this would be a special year.

The automatic qualifying standard for the USATF Outdoor Championships is 44-11½, but Kurywchak should make the 18-woman field even if she doesn’t jump any farther between now and the national meet. Last year, 13 U.S. triple jumpers had marks longer than Kurywchak’s current best of 44-6¼.

“I should be sitting pretty,” Kurywchak said.

Perhaps she’ll have the same feeling the evening of June 22 in Sacramento that she had the evening of March 5 in Albuquerque.