

The Revolutionary by Richard Hoffer

Just because he was from the right side of town (and in little Medford, Ore., there was a right and a wrong side), Dick Fosbury was no more insulated from adolescent angst than the next teenager. He was tall, gangly to the extreme—"a grew-too-fast kid," his coach would say—and not good enough at anything he did to keep above the hallway fray.

Here's how it was at Medford High: Say Steve Davis (right side of town) spotted Bill Enyart (wrong side), first day of school. He'd grab Enyart by the neck and turn his collar inside out, exposing the source of shame right there on the label for all to see. "JC Penney!" he'd howl. And keep in mind, Enyart was the Medford High fullback, on his way to becoming Earthquake Enyart, an NFL career down the line. Social-class distinction offsets brawn any day. But do you think Davis would recognize Fosbury's shared aristocracy? (Fosbury's father was a truck sales manager, his mother a secretary.) If Davis caught Fosbury loitering by Fosbury's locker, he'd punch him in the shoulder.

Medford's bucolic charms—peach and pear orchards spreading beyond the modest cityscape (pop. 25,000)—were no consolation. Loving parents were great, but not as much use as you'd think when it came to the ritual humiliation of simply growing up. Did Dick Fosbury have it made? Of course. Was his every need fulfilled? Sure. But he was a child of yearning, of insufficient achievement, of bad skin, his talents such that nobody could take him seriously. He was beginning to understand the curse of the bell curve: He might very well be average. And when his head hit the pillow, no matter how soft the bed, he was as miserable as the next 13-year-old.

Fosbury hoped to play basketball. In fact, being 6'4", he fully expected to. But Medford High was loaded and had six guys who could dunk. (Steve Davis, a bigger and better athlete than Fosbury, was one of them.) Fosbury sat on the bench. His senior year, 1965, when the team went to the state tournament, he remained at home so that more promising underclassmen could gain the experience. He played football, a third-string end (Davis was the primary receiver) until his junior year, when Enyart came up under him during a blocking drill and knocked out his two front teeth. Enyart was his great pal. In the cold of winter, when the coed P.E. classes would be given over to dancing in the gym, the two would stand together on the sideline, trying to remain invisible, which was complicated by their height. (Enyart stood 6'3".) Come ladies' choice, though, Big Lois would pick Fosbury, and that would be quite a scene, the two of them doing the Freddie, their long arms and legs flapping like hinged two-by-fours. So Enyart felt bad about those teeth.

Fosbury's real love was track. Although he quickly recognized that he wasn't going to amount to much in races, his lankiness was not as big a handicap in the high jump. This was something he could do, sort of. Beginning in the fifth grade he made the high jump his event, using his height and long legs to get a quarter inch a year out of the antique Scissors jump, the one in which you run at the bar on a diagonal and more or less hurdle it, scissoring your legs over the bar and landing on your feet. The technique had been considered outdated since 1895, when straddling jumps were introduced. Still, Fosbury had gotten as high as 5'4" in junior high, and he'd even won one or two meets a year.

In high school it was a different story. His varsity coach insisted on the Western Roll, in which a jumper also runs in from an angle but kicks his outer (rather than inner) leg over the bar and crosses the bar sideways, usually landing on his feet. Fosbury couldn't get the hang of it. The takeoff foot seemed wrong.

The whole thing was awkward. His first competition as a sophomore was an invitational, a meet of perhaps 20 teams, as many as 60 high jumpers involved, and Fosbury failed to clear the opening height of five feet on all three chances. He was going backward! If he maintained this level of improvement, he'd be tripping over curbs. Steve Davis, meanwhile, was clearing six feet pretty easily.

Maybe there comes a time in every kid's life when he confronts his mediocrity and submits to the tyranny of normality. A life without expression: just another guy, not a single trait or talent to mark him in a crowd. Fosbury, all of 15 now, wasn't there yet. He hadn't been crushed. On a 25-mile bus trip to Grants Pass, Ore., for a rotary meet with a dozen schools, he stared out the window and decided he was going to do whatever it took, make one last jump. If he finished the year at 5'4", the same as he jumped in ninth grade, he was done, doomed to a third-string life.

Fosbury reverted to the Scissors for his first jump that day (his coach, sympathetic, had given him grudging permission) and was relieved to clear 5'4". But that wouldn't be enough. The other jumpers were still warming up, waiting for the bar to be set at an age-appropriate height, while Fosbury continued to noodle around at his junior high elevations. If they, or anybody else, had been interested, though, they might have seen an odd transformation taking place, more like a possession, really. Fosbury was now arching backward ever so slightly as he scissored the bar, his rear end now coming up, his shoulders going down. He cleared 5'6". He didn't even know what he was doing, his body reacting to desperation. His third round, his body reclined even more, and he made 5'8".

The other jumpers began to gather; the coaches looked up from their charts. There was something odd about this, crazy even. On his fourth attempt Fosbury took a surprisingly leisurely approach to the bar and—My God! He was completely flat on his back now!—cleared 5'10". The coaches began arguing. Was this legal? Was it safe? Should it be allowed? What, exactly, had they just seen? The high jump was an event that measured advancement by fractions of an inch, sometimes over a year. Fosbury, conducting his own quiet defiance, had just improved a half foot in one day.

There have not been many breakthroughs in the annals of personal locomotion. Running forward, for example, is still considered the quickest unassisted way to get from point A to point B. Perhaps early man experimented with backpedaling as a means of escape, but the technique probably did not survive the first saber-toothed tiger. All the important means of fleeing and chasing were established early on, and with a certainty that only life-and-death consequences can provide.

This rather obvious reality has frozen sports—most of which are just highly stylized versions of getting from here to there—in time. If a cartwheel had been the most efficient way for our forebears to leap a chasm, then today's long jump competition would look much different. Some movements are simply beyond improvement.

Consider, then, the Fosbury Flop, an upside-down and backward leap over a high bar, an outright—an outrageous!—perversion of acceptable methods of jumping over obstacles. An absolute departure in form and technique. It was an insult to suggest, after all these aeons, that there had been a better way to get over a barrier all along. And if there were, it ought to have come from a coach, a professor of kinesiology, a biomechanic, not an Oregon teenager of middling jumping ability.

And yet Dick Fosbury was the perfect, maybe the only, vehicle for innovation when it came to the high jump. All athletes recognize a performance imperative, a drive to exceed their limits, to explore upper

boundaries. It's why they train and tweak. But Fosbury had the additional impetus of being a teenager. There is no swifter, more terrible saber-toothed tiger than the ritual humiliation of adolescence. He felt that animal's breath on his neck every day, and he felt it more keenly than his peers: He had picked the one sport that might return the favor of his determination but had gotten embarrassment instead.

In sport, the rarest kind of innovation is true, elemental change. The catalog of tinkering, or invention, that has produced substantive departures in form is slim indeed. Candy Cummings's "skewball" in the 1860s, the progenitor of the curveball? Notre Dame's forward pass in 1913? Paul Arizon's jump shot in the 1950s? The core movements of athletics, grounded in so much human history, do not easily, or very often, yield to change. Modern sports are somewhat amenable to improvement, but the rewards of experimentation diminish in proportion to the antiquity of the event. And few are older than the high jump.

Ancient though it was, the high jump at least seemed agreeable to experimentation. Jumpers found that they could throw themselves over the bar, more or less forward, by tucking their takeoff legs under their bodies. The Eastern Cutoff (which combined the Scissors motion with a headfirst approach), first seen in 1892, gave way to the Western Roll in 1912. By 1930 the last great change had occurred, although it was only a change by degrees. Now jumpers, still flinging themselves over headfirst, did not tuck their legs anywhere but stretched them horizontally. The facedown technique—like throwing your leg over a saddle—became known as the Straddle and produced another inch or two in height.

And that, except for some fooling around with run-up speeds and arm movements (the Russians were particularly good at putting all these little elements together, winning Olympic gold in 1960 and '64) was where the event remained until Fosbury's day. All jumpers used the Straddle. It was the only way to go.

When Fosbury jumped 5'10" at that rotary meet at Grants Pass in 1963, he was in a back layout position, his shoulders going even farther back in reaction to his lifting hips. It was on-site engineering, his body and mind working together, making reflexive adjustments with only one goal, getting over the bar. In an act of spontaneity, or maybe rebellion, he created a style unto itself.

Fosbury's coach, Dean Benson, was not about to insist that he give up six inches on account of tradition. The improvement was too sensational. The next season, his junior year, Fosbury continued to refine the jump. His arms and legs were still all over the place, but what looked like an airborne seizure was actually Darwinian activity. Those tics and flailings that served to get him even a quarter inch higher survived. The rest were gradually pared away. During that next full year of his upside-down layout, Fosbury began to lean with his shoulder, about 45 degrees to the bar, and broke the school record of 6'3". By his senior year he had introduced a curved approach, turning his back to the bar, completing the rotation, arching, lifting his hips and kicking his feet clear in a final motion. He finished second in the state, now able to clear 6'5½", well ahead of Steve Davis.

Fosbury was gaining attention, but more as a novelty than as the next new thing. In 1964 a photographer captured this craziness, and the shot went around the world, Des Moines to Johannesburg. **WORLD'S LAZIEST HIGH JUMPER** was the caption in one newspaper. A better caption, appearing under a staff photo in the *Medford Mail-Tribune*, was **FOSBURY FLOPS OVER THE BAR**. A reporter returned to the phrase in a meet story, saying Fosbury looked like nothing more than a fish flopping into a boat. Fosbury was tickled by the connotation of failure. He was a contrarian at heart. The Fosbury Flop was born.

You might ask, If this was a far superior method, why hadn't somebody invented it before Fosbury? First, it wasn't necessarily a far superior method. For some past champions, it might not have been the least bit superior. But for a certain kind of jumper, one who just couldn't combine all the elements of conventional technique—a fast run-up, exaggerated arm action or, more important, the straight-leg kick at takeoff that

seemed to lift the jumper over the bar—Fosbury's new method might be more rewarding. Fosbury was a bent-leg jumper. In his upside-down leap it didn't matter where his legs were, as long as they kicked free at the end.

As to why nobody had come across this before, well, somebody had. In 1959 Bruce Quande, a kid at Flathead County (Mont.) High, had started with the Scissors and had gradually rolled it over. Just like Fosbury. But Quande was not driven the way Fosbury was—the best part of being on the track team for him was stopping for ice cream on the trip back from meets—and he never made much of it. Nobody did.

There was good reason for that. Completing the Flop successfully was only half the battle; the return to earth still had to be negotiated. Few would even consider such an experiment in flight knowing they'd have to land on their necks. During Fosbury's sophomore year, the landing pit was only a pile of wood chips and sawdust. It was safe but not comfortable. By his junior year, though, his school had installed a foam pit, and the idea of a head plant, while still daunting, was a bit more palatable.

Still, even with a jump named after him, Fosbury was mostly unknown and mostly unwanted. Even after finishing second at the state meet in his senior year, college coaches were not calling. It wasn't discrimination, just performance. Not until the summer after graduation, when Fosbury won the national junior championship with a jump of 6'7", did he get the first call. Berny Wagner, the new coach at Oregon State, took a chance on Fosbury and got him a small scholarship. That was all Fosbury was looking for anyway, an education, a chance at an engineering career. If the Flop could help get him a degree, it would have done its job.

Wagner knew Fosbury had jumped 6'7"; he just didn't know how. The coach wasn't hidebound, but he wasn't going to encourage something as crazy as the Flop. Let's get back to the Straddle, Wagner said. "You're the coach," Fosbury said. "You line out a program, and I'll follow it." But the Straddle didn't work for him in college any more than it had in high school, and he regressed. Wagner had taken a 6'7" jumper and turned him into a 5'6" stumbler.

So Fosbury began flopping in meets. It was strictly a face-saving maneuver. What did Wagner care, anyway? He had since acquired a couple of bona fide Straddle jumpers, and his investment in Fosbury was small enough not to trouble him further. But finally something happened. In the spring of Fosbury's sophomore season, Wagner took him to a three-way meet in Fresno. Using the Flop, Fosbury jumped 6'10", not only an increase of three inches from the season before but also an Oregon State record. Wagner took him aside after the meet and said, "O.K., that's it. I'm not sure exactly what you're doing, but it's working for you. So stick with it, I guess."

Sports can be generous like that, overruling biases in favor of results. With wins and losses at stake, Wagner hedged his bets. By the end of the season he was teaching some of the other jumpers how to do the Flop.

Except for the fact that nobody could teach him any of the historical methods of jumping, Fosbury was extremely coachable. When Wagner told him he needed more conditioning, Fosbury ran and hopped the 83 rows in Parker Stadium. You couldn't appeal to tradition with Fosbury, but you could fire his competitive neurons. That was something else about him, that need to win. Fosbury was not intrigued by benchmarks. In fact, after his event was won, he never continued jumping just to set a record. "He jumps against people, not heights," Wagner said.

At the end of his sophomore season Fosbury placed fourth in the college nationals but was still not a world-class high jumper; he was maybe in the top 25 in the U.S. But he was at least gaining renown for his style. Meet promoters who got a look at the Flop began inviting him to their events—the Oakland Indoor, the San Francisco All American Games. They didn't care how high he jumped, just how much hype he could generate. And the press loved it. A *Los Angeles Times* headline: BEAVER PHYSICS STUDENT TO SHOW UNUSUAL JUMPING FORM TODAY.

Since Fosbury hardly ever practiced the Flop ("There's no use wearing myself out," he said), the additional meets offered yet more opportunity for improvement. With higher grades of competition he was literally raising the bar on his event. In Oakland he cleared seven feet for the first time. *Track & Field News* put him on its cover in February 1968, as much to herald a format change for the magazine as a sea change in the high jump.

As a junior Fosbury became the country's most consistent seven-foot jumper. He won the 1968 NAAs with a jump of 7'2½". Up to then the attention he had been getting was for the character of his jump, not its magnitude. Fosbury had found it amusing to supply feature writers with a variety of origin myths, telling some he'd graphed out the Flop on paper first, others that he'd stumbled backward on his takeoff. But now, with these kinds of heights, it was getting more serious. "So, Dick," a sportswriter asked him, "any plans on going to the Olympics?" Fosbury had never registered that ambition, and he'd never been to a single international meet. Could his first be an Olympics? Wild!

Avery Brundage, president of the International Olympic Committee, had come back from the Little Olympics, a fact-finding meet in Mexico City in 1966, and proclaimed the site of the '68 Summer Games safe. "I have seen the runners at high altitude," he announced, "and no one fell down dead." As reassuring as this was, members of the U.S. Olympic Committee decided on a program of altitude acclimation closer to the actual Games.

And so male track and field athletes were gathered at South Lake Tahoe, Calif., in early September 1968 and asked to breathe air at a Mexico City--like elevation of 7,370 feet. Some of the men who showed up thought it might as well have been for the scenery, maybe a little tuning up, but certainly not to make the team. They had done that in the last week of June, when they qualified at the Olympic trials in Los Angeles. According to the rules, at least as far as anyone understood them, the top 10 or 12 from each event in Los Angeles went to the high-altitude camp for further winnowing, but the winner had automatically qualified for the Olympic team. So they thought.

After winning the NCAA championship in mid-June, Fosbury had gone 7'1" to win the high jump at the trials. He had returned to Oregon, goofed off a bit, then packed his bags and set forth for Lake Tahoe in his Chevy II, no hurry. But upon checking in he learned that his spot on the U.S. team was up for grabs after all. The USOC had decided that the sea-level trials at Los Angeles might be a poor predictor of success in Mexico City. Even the winners would have to qualify anew. Fosbury felt a panic rising in him. He was jumping erratically—"Hit-and-miss," he said—and the competition was bunching up around him. Fosbury needed all three tries to make 7'2", at which he joined Olympic veteran Ed Caruthers, high schooler Reynaldo Brown and John Hartfield. But because of his misses, Fosbury was in fourth place. Hartfield, without any misses, was in first. Since none of the four had ever jumped 7'3", it was unlikely that the standings would change. Hartfield could not lose, and Fosbury could not qualify.

The bar was lifted an inch, which might have been a foot as far as they were concerned. But the weather was warm, and the juices were flowing. Caruthers, running ever so slowly, straddled the bar, just ticking it, but making it over safely. Brown likewise touched the bar on his attempt but also made it. Hartfield missed. Fosbury corkscrewed over the bar cleanly and came up out of the foam pit grinning madly.

But he hadn't made the team yet. Hartfield could still close him out on misses if he made the height. As Hartfield lined up, though, Fosbury's coach had a sudden inspiration. Since 7'3" would have been an Oregon State record, Wagner asked to remeasure, so that it would qualify. Hartfield didn't notice this and started for the bar, stopping only when he saw the congestion of officials under the standards. It shook him up.

After the officials finally cleared out, Hartfield missed his remaining jumps. It was over. His sure trip to Olympic glory had just been canceled, and he ran into the woods, disappearing into a thick stand of Ponderosa pines. It was years before Fosbury saw him again.

Gary Stenlund was a good man to know at an Olympics. He'd arranged for friends to bring his VW bus down to Mexico City. It was a 1965 camper, a cream-colored pop-top beauty, perfect for the escapades he had in mind. When Stenlund and Fosbury toured the city, beer cans rattling in the back, it was usually in the company of two young women—former swimming gold medalists, as a matter of fact. Stenlund had laid that groundwork back in South Lake Tahoe. He was basically a one-stop party, Stenlund, anticipating all the requirements of fun.

Fosbury was not in Stenlund's league when it came to partying, wasn't even in the same sport. Stenlund's event was the javelin, but he liked to boast he was a decathlete when it came to the consumption of spirits. He was 28 and had been hitting them hard for 10 years, even while competing at an elite level. He could drink a case of beer, or a gallon of wine, or a fifth of whiskey, and throw the javelin 260 feet the next day. Often, anyway. When it mattered, he could cut back. The night before finals qualifying in Mexico City he held himself to only four beers, although as it turned out—he finished 17th—he might as well have drunk his full schedule.

But the days leading up to the Games were a good time to have wheels and women. There was plenty to explore, and the people were so hospitable, so friendly. Mexico City was dedicating itself to the amusement and amazement of its visitors, and you would have been a very poor guest to ignore such an offer.

An event that the guys and gals of Stenlund's camper definitely wanted to see was the arrival of the Olympic torch at the Pyramid of the Moon, 30 miles away in the pre-Columbian ruins of Teotihuacán. Mexican organizers had used some imagination in designing the ritual torch relay, choosing the paths of early explorers such as Cortés. On Saturday, Mexico's torchbearer, Enriqueta Basilio, a 20-year-old hurdler, would carry the flame up the steps to the cauldron in the Olympic Stadium and start the Games. But the Friday-night ceremonies at Teotihuacán, Mexico's first great city, offered considerably more authenticity.

The Pyramid of the Moon is located on the Avenue of the Dead, but it was a very lively place when Stenlund and Fosbury and the girls got there. Tens of thousands of Mexicans had gathered at the pyramid for song and native performances. (There were 1,500 brightly costumed dancers on hand.) The four Americans ate chicken tacos and bean soup, drank the local beer, listened to the mariachis and settled in for the arrival of the torch. This was not going to be just another stop for the sacred fire, either;

Sylvania had rigged the site with 1,900 flashbulbs, and the instant the runner lit the flame, the entire pyramid would light up. When the runner bent his torch to the cauldron, it was like a lightning strike. Stenlund, Fosbury and the women were thoroughly seduced by the scene and decided to stay there the night, at the base of the ancient pyramid, under the stars.

Back in Mexico City, meanwhile, all roads within a mile of the Olympic Stadium were closed to everybody but officials, taxis and buses for the opening ceremonies. But even sanctioned traffic exceeded the event's parking capacity. Cars and buses were simply abandoned as close to the destination as possible. Try as he might, Stenlund could not get his group to the ceremonies. He beeped his little horn and maneuvered as best he could, but it was no use. He and Fosbury and the girls laughed all the way.

Ed Caruthers was 19 years old at the 1964 Olympics, and he was without a coach or friends in Tokyo. About all he could do was rattle around the athletes' village. He played some Ping-Pong, but mostly he hung out in the dining room. He had three weeks before his event, and it seemed forever. So what if he was going back and forth to the ice cream machine? What else did he have to do?

Caruthers gained 10 pounds, and even if the weight was distributed invisibly along his 6'5" frame, it was quite a disadvantage. Jumping over a bar set at 7'1", which he had been doing that season, tops in the country, was never easy. Doing it with the equivalent of a Thanksgiving turkey tucked under his arm might be impossible. Despite a crash diet of breakfast cereal in the final days before his event, Caruthers could not return to form, and he jumped almost three inches beneath his personal best to finish eighth.

At least Caruthers could return for a second Olympics still very much in his prime. This time he would know better than to subsist on soft-serve ice cream. But the Olympics are subject to a terrible serendipity and do not always yield to determination. Caruthers would find that self-sacrifice, at the dairy bar or anywhere else, would count for little and that at the Mexico City Games, in a year that honored idiosyncrasy above all else, even the jump of his life wouldn't get him gold.

Because who could have anticipated Dick Fosbury? Caruthers had first seen him at the NCAA championships in 1967, employing a "goofball kind of thing" to get over the bar. He had not been impressed. But at the Los Angeles trials the next year, when Fosbury won with a leap of 7'1", Caruthers was obliged to take notice. *Sport* magazine called Fosbury "our best bet" to win the Olympic high jump. But tradition always prevails, and Caruthers liked his own chances. After all, he'd won the trials in Tahoe, the ones that counted.

In Mexico City, Caruthers was mindful of diet and nutrition, and Fosbury conducted preparations that were almost daffy in comparison. He and Stenlund were always tearing around the city. They liked to rumble up to the Hotel del Angel off Reforma Boulevard, where they'd go to the penthouse bar and hang out with the ABC crews. They'd sit at the feet of Howard Cosell and Jim McKay and absorb their stories. As far as training went, well, Fosbury had his own program.

The one thing he didn't like to do in practice was jump. He was a dedicated athlete, but he simply did not believe in jumping without proper incentive, or even atmosphere. It was only in competition, with the adrenaline flowing, that Fosbury could make a jump that mattered. And the crowd: He required attention to perform. In practice, with nobody watching him and nothing on the line, it was all he could do to make a few desultory repetitions.

Wagner had made the trip to Mexico City and insisted that Fosbury jump at least once. "Look," he said, "you've got a month here, you're getting rusty, you gotta do something." So Fosbury put off his adventures with Stenlund for a day and went to the practice field for a quick session. He just went through

the motions until a rainstorm rolled through, forcing everyone to run for cover. Under a tarp he found himself shoulder-to-shoulder with Valentin Gavrilov, the Soviet Union's No. 1 jumper. They nodded, then engaged in a stumbling conversation. Gavrilov was the enemy, not only in sport but also in every way possible. Because of Gavrilov's government, Fosbury had had to duck under his school desk for air-raid drills. He'd had to worry about nuclear clouds poisoning his family. Yet there they were, chatting away, Gavrilov in his halting English, about events in Mexico, conditions at the athletes' village, everything. The storm cleared out after an hour, but Fosbury and Gavrilov, mortal enemies, remained under the tarp awhile longer, chewing the fat.

Saturday night, the eve of the high jump finals, was not restful for Fosbury. He was still worked up from the qualifying rounds earlier that day, which chopped the field down to a dozen finalists. He visualized his jumps over and over. The nocturnal filmstrip played across his eyelids, keeping him awake.

Sunday was a perfect clear, crisp October day, temperature in the mid-70s by 1 p.m., when the high jumpers filed onto the infield. The Olympic Stadium was full, 80,000 fans on hand for the Games' track and field windup. Besides the high jump, there were two men's relays, the 1,500-meter race, a women's relay and the marathon. It was going to be a wild day, though nobody could have guessed how wild.

Poor Ed Caruthers. He had a plan—usually important but, in an Olympics, likely irrelevant, perhaps laughable. Caruthers figured on a jump of 7'3", maybe even 7'4", an Olympic record, by his fifth pass, and he'd have his gold. What he didn't consider was the size of the field, which included many lesser jumpers, guys who had no shot but filled out the finals. To accommodate their numbers, the competition was begun at a height of 6'6", four inches lower than Caruthers's planned entry point. To get even there was taking forever.

Fosbury, on the other hand, had no grand plan, hoping to start at 6'8" and to increase his height two inches at a time to seven feet. It was slow going as the field remained intact nearly to that height. Then, at 6'11½", it started to thin; five failed to clear. Everybody else made the next height, 7'¼", but Caruthers needed all three tries while Fosbury made it on his first attempt. Caruthers, Fosbury and Brown, the other U.S. jumper, passed at 7'1", while Italian and West German jumpers could not scrape over and left the competition. It was now a cold war showdown, three Americans and two Soviets, the way the Olympics were meant to be. The bar was set at just under 7'2". The sun was getting lower, and the fans were starting to get interested.

Fosbury cleared the bar cleanly. When he jumped, though, the spectators laughed. Brown missed on all three tries, as did the Soviet Union's Valery Skvortsov. Gavrilov passed. Caruthers, having missed his first two tries, stared at the bar on his third attempt and flew over it by a full two inches.

Only the three medal winners remained to sort out the podium order. The sight of Fosbury, rocking back and forth on his heels the entire two minutes allowed for his approach and then exploding over the bar upside down, was now generating a lot of excitement. As he came to look more like a champion and less like a circus clown, the crowd's giggles were replaced by cheers. Few fan favorites ever developed in less time.

All three jumpers made 7'2½" on the first try. Now, at 7'3¼", the bronze medalist was determined. As the men's 4 × 100 relay teams wandered through the jump area, Fosbury took his stance, rocked back and forth and dived over. The crowd went wild. Caruthers made it on his second try, but Gavrilov, Fosbury's new buddy, could not clear, and he was out.

It was nearly twilight, four hours into the competition. Shadows were touching the outside of the track, and the air was cooling. Caruthers's strategy was now "out the door," he said. Fosbury had yet to miss a jump, and Caruthers knew that having had to make 10 attempts to Fosbury's six, he was fading. The crowd had swung entirely to Fosbury. "The press, usually reserved even at these emotion-charged Olympics," reported *Track & Field News*, "cheered at his every jump." The *Los Angeles Times*'s Jim Murray was agape at the journalistic gift that was being handed to him. "Fosbury," he wrote, "goes over the bar like a guy being pushed out of a 30-story window." A German writer exclaimed, "Only a triple somersault off a flying trapeze with no net below could be more thrilling."

The bar was set at 7'4¼", not a world record but a U.S. and Olympic record, a touch more than either Fosbury or Caruthers had ever cleared. Fosbury's heels ticked the bar on his first attempt, for his first miss of the competition. Caruthers missed too. Fosbury missed again. Caruthers missed. The fans were on their feet.

For his third attempt Fosbury went through his usual deliberations—that interminable rocking back and forth, the wiggling of his fingers—eating up the allowable two minutes. He used this time not only to psych himself up but also to review the mechanics of the jump, which required untold adjustments as he converted horizontal force into vertical. He was always fighting his takeoff, which threatened to turn his pass into a long jump instead of a high jump. He rocked, and the fans counted with him, "One, two, three," and kept counting. "Forty," they chanted, "41." Fosbury thought just a little more and then, satisfied with his preparations, began his looping jog to the bar.

As he did so, the first marathoners entered the stadium. Usually this is a moment of catharsis. The runners' appearance, which is always a surprise, touches off what is generally the biggest cheer of the Games. But not this time. The marathoners got just a smattering of applause. The crowd was devoted to the gangly guy floating upside down.

Fosbury veered off, threw his left shoulder to the bar and lifted, peering sideways over that shoulder. He was registering everything now: the eerie quiet of the stadium, the slight whoosh of his shorts, the clap-clap-clap of the marathoners as they worked their way to the finish. The air really was thin up there. Fosbury watched the bar glide under him, completed his ideal parabola and crashed backward onto the Port-a-Pit. From the foam landing he could look up and see that the jump was clean, but he hardly had to witness it for himself. Some 80,000 people had already told him it was good: "Olé!"

Fosbury sprang out of the pit, flashing a victory sign and a wide grin. U.S. marathoner Kenny Moore, entering the stadium on his way to a 14th-place finish, looked around, trying to understand the crowd's sudden reaction. What was going on? Seeing his friend Fosbury loping around, his hands high, Moore understood. Continuing down the straightaway, he began dancing a jig.

Less happy was Ed Caruthers. His only chance at a gold medal had been for Fosbury to miss and for him, jumping next, to make the height. That couldn't happen now. Even if he made the height—he debated passing, moving the bar up a notch—it had been settled on misses. He took his turn all the same. He brushed the bar on his way down, knocked it off and lay in the pit for minutes, realizing he'd have an altogether different life from the one he'd imagined for himself, that difference made by a half inch.

Fosbury and Stenlund stuck around Mexico, but just as they had missed the opening ceremonies, so did they miss the closing. The two of them, along with the two women swimmers they'd camped out with

in Teotihuacán weeks earlier, set off in Stenlund's VW camper for a resort in the mountains. Fosbury was tired of the attention, exhausted from being asked his opinion, his reaction, how he named his jump. He was glad to be somewhere with a pool and a few beers and some pals with whom to enjoy them.

Fosbury's new status as an Olympic champion, coupled with his determined idiosyncrasy, made him a national hero of sorts. When he went home to Medford, a ticker-tape parade was held for him, but because there were no buildings taller than two stories, kids had to run alongside his car to shower him with confetti.

He went on *The Tonight Show* and tried to teach Johnny Carson and fellow guest Bill Cosby how to do the Flop. (Performing in dress shoes, he memorably slipped on his own try.) He went on *The Dating Game*. But his heart wasn't in it. It wasn't even in the high jump anymore. He competed for Oregon State for one more season, but it was a forced march, satisfying an obligation to his school. As soon as he completed the season, finding enough fire to win the NCAAs again, he quit the sport and rededicated himself to his engineering studies. All he'd wanted in the first place was a degree.

Meanwhile, Stenlund cruised through the rest of the '60s and into the '70s in his VW camper, high as could be. He says he went seven years without cutting his hair, taking the camper on cross-country trips, Ken Kesey style.

One night, "stoned and tripping," Stenlund says, he rolled that van in an Ohio cornfield. There was nothing he could say to the cops, especially as he was nude, except for a black sheepskin seat cover. In later years, it must be reported, Stenlund sobered up, stayed sober and returned to track and field, competing in USA Masters events. But that was it for the camper.