



Photo credit: Kirby Lee, Image of Sport

AMANDA SMOCK

Perseverance Payoff Is London Flight

STEADY, INCREMENTAL PROGRESS ENCOURAGED Amanda (Thieschafer) Smock to persevere with her triple jumping career through three Olympic Trials and reap the sweet reward of qualifying for the 2012 Olympics in London, England.

Amanda's early interest was gymnastics, enhanced by watching the movie *Nadia*. "I knew all of the lines," she says, grinning. Born in Long Prairie, Minnesota, in 1982, Amanda and her older brother, Josh, attended Melrose High School in central Minnesota. The town of 3,500 in Stearns County is in the heart of Minnesota's dairyland. It is also the hometown of Mark Olberding, one of Minnesota's better-known professional basketball players (1975–87). Her father, Glen, was a housing contractor, and her mother, Beth, was an accountant; both parents served as gymnastics coaches for the school district. Melrose captured the Class A state gymnastics titles in both 1994 and 1995 under their guidance. "Being in the gym was a big part of our childhood," adds Amanda.

Combining her love for gymnastics with her dedication and athleticism, Amanda placed third in the all-around competition in the state meet and second in the vault in 2000. She actually had more success in track and field, but she disliked the sport. "In junior high I once hid while the team was preparing to go to a meet so I wouldn't have to go," she admits. Nevertheless, Amanda participated in pole vault, long jump, and triple jump for Melrose and won both jump events at the state track and field meet her junior and senior years. Her triple jump of 39 feet 4¼ inches in the 2000 state meet won by a convincing margin of more than 2½ feet ahead of the second-place finisher.

Amanda's opinion of track and field changed following her graduation from high school in 2000. She wanted to fill the void left from gymnastics and decided to continue long and triple jumping at the collegiate level. The prospect of going to a Division I school was intimidating, so Amanda checked out North Dakota State



AMANDA IN FLIGHT AT THE KANSAS RELAYS
Photo courtesy of NDSU Athletics Media Relations

University (NDSU) in Fargo, North Dakota. The school seemed to be a good fit in multiple ways. “I liked the size of the school, and things just clicked with Brent Parmer, the jumps coach. He was very knowledgeable in jumps and energetic. At the college there was a lot more excitement in the environment, and NDSU had a good team.” Amanda now liked the challenge, technique, and focus required of triple jumping. Parmer remembers their introduction. “Amanda seemed shy and reserved, but you could tell—through her father—she was a very determined athlete. She always wanted to learn more.”

A technical sport, triple jumping has been an athletic event in all the modern Olympics, but it did not open to women until 1996. Also known as the “hop-step-jump,” the triple jump

demands acceleration, rhythm, speed, and strength while also maintaining control and using good body position. The athlete must take off and land on the same leg (the “hop”), then land on the other foot (the “step,” sometimes referred to as the “bound”), and finally take flight (the “jump”) and land in the sand pit.

As a first-year student with the NDSU Bison, Amanda gained technical skills, qualified for nationals, and also met Greg Smock, a middle-distance runner on the men’s track team from Big Lake, Minnesota. They would marry eight years later. Coach Parmer noted Amanda’s improvement and strengths. “Her biggest asset is her body and spatial awareness—and that made her easy to coach. She was a lot of fun and ready to go—so was the whole ‘jump crew.’ We had some other great athletes, and they helped each other become even better jumpers.” Indeed, two Bison teammates from Minnesota—Cassandra Olson (Ogilvie) and Sara Skudlarek (Holdingford)—and

a third teammate, Crystal Cummins (Fargo, North Dakota), also became All-Americans. Amanda became a three-time NCAA Division II national champion in the triple jump, twice at the indoor championships (2002 and 2004) and once at the outdoor championships (2003). She reached the 13 meter (42 feet 8¼ inches) mark in 2004 and earned an invitation to the Olympic Trials at venerable Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon.

Nervous, Amanda finished seventeenth at the trials, but she met a fellow Minnesotan named Shani Marks (of Apple Valley, Minnesota), and a warm friendship developed. Amanda was also hooked on the sport and determined to improve although she had completed her collegiate eligibility and graduated with a degree in exercise physiology. "I knew I wasn't ready to stop competing. The solid progression made me think I could continue to get better. Going to the University of Minnesota [U of M] for graduate school made the transition seamless. I had a training partner [Shani, who had finished fourth at the trials], a training facility that was convenient, and a coach." Matt Bingle, the women's track and field coach at the U of M, was Amanda's new resource. And Amanda was a new resource to the young women on the team as a volunteer assistant coach.

"I knew I wasn't ready to stop competing. The solid progression made me think I could continue to get better. Going to the University of Minnesota [U of M] for graduate school made the transition seamless. I had a training partner [Shani, who had finished fourth at the trials], a training facility that was convenient, and a coach."

While working on a doctorate in exercise physiology at the U of M, Amanda and Marks trained five to six days per week. They created games like "Champion of the Universe" to make the practices more fun and stimulating. The pair also critiqued each other's technique and did sprint drills, weightlifting, and event-specific com-



**THE CREDENTIALS OF GLEN THIESCHAFFER WITH NEW DATE
INSCRIBED ON IT**

Photo courtesy of Amanda Smock

ponents of the triple jump such as approach and takeoff. Marks notes, "Amanda's technique and form were always constant." Amanda also spent her afternoons helping coach the women's track team.

Amanda was hopeful as she prepared for the 2008 Olympic Trials. "I felt ready and excited, but I would still have to jump farther than I had ever before." With her parents in attendance, Amanda placed fifth but found consolation in her good friend winning the competition. "I was excited for Shani," she says sincerely. Marks was realizing her dream and going to Beijing, China, as a member of the US Olympic team (she would finish twenty-eighth). Afterward, her father, Glen, rubbed off the

marked "2008" year on his credential tags and replaced it with the number "2012." Clearly Amanda had her family's support to continue her efforts to realize her dream.

Glen Thieschafer, age fifty-two, had cancer. In 2009 Amanda experienced a year fraught with emotions. Amanda and Greg Smock, who had graduated from law school at the U of M and was now a patent attorney, married in February. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Glen's health worsened, and Amanda returned to Melrose for the last six weeks of his life. Shani would graciously meet Amanda on occasion at St. John's University (about twenty-five miles east of Melrose) so she could continue to practice. Glen died in June, two weeks before the United States Track and Field Championships. He and Beth had been inducted into the Minnesota Girls' Gymnastics Coaches Hall of Fame in 1999. Ten years later, the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association honored Glen by enshrining him into their hall of fame. For the next three years, Amanda would have Glen's rewritten "2012" credentials tag posted to inspire her to practice, compete, and win.

Following a doctoral degree in 2010, triumphs were gained. Amanda Smock

was the 2011 national outdoor champion and the 2011 indoor runner-up. In the 2011 US Track and Field national championship, she won with a distance of 46 feet 2 inches, nearly a foot more than runner-up Toni Smith. Despite the national championships, Amanda had to scramble to qualify for the World Championships in 2011. She darted from one meet to another to try and hit the qualifying standard of 46 feet 3½ inches (14.1 meters) without success. In August of 2011, she entered a meet at Chula Vista, California, and soared to a personal best of 46 feet 6¼ inches (14.18 meters). An elated Amanda had not only qualified for the World Championships, but she had also hit the “B” qualifying standard for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. The importance of that achievement is that if no athlete from a country meets the Olympic “A” qualifying mark for an event, one person (rather than three) can still qualify and represent their country if the “B” standard is met. At this time, Amanda was the only American triple jumper to attain the “B” standard.

Amanda had added a full meter to her triple jump distance since she had graduated from college. She was ready for her third Olympic Trials, and she was taking an extra set of credentials, the set her father had rewritten, to Oregon. Amanda won her flight (a group in the preliminary round of competition) to qualify for the finals and then duplicated that feat by winning not only the finals with a leap of 45 feet 9 inches (13.94 meters), but also a berth on the United States Olympic team. A bonus was four of Glen’s sisters driving to Hayward Field to witness and celebrate the victory. Certainly Amanda felt her father’s presence as she remembered his lifetime of encouragement. The credentials would now be taking an international flight—to London, England, for the 2012 Olympics. Her husband, Greg, and mother and brother, Beth and Josh, would also make the trip to London to cheer on Amanda.



GREG AND AMANDA SMOCK AT NDSU NIGHT AT A MINNESOTA TWINS GAME (AMANDA THREW OUT THE FIRST PITCH)

Photo courtesy of NDSU Athletics Media Relations

**AMANDA SMOCK SPRINTING DOWN RUNWAY**

Photo credit: Kirby Lee, Image of Sport

"I turned thirty on Opening Day of the Olympics. It was electrifying in the stadium. It was a thrill to stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's greatest athletes," Amanda says reflectively. She struck up a friendship with javelin thrower Rachel Yurkovich (now Buciarski) at the training camp in Birmingham, England, before the start of the Olympic Games. "We had a good time as we trained and hung out in the Village. It was everything you could imagine."

Rather than the customary six jumps of most competitions, the Olympics only permits three jumps in the qualifying round for an athlete to reach the finals. "It was about executing my jump and doing my best," states Amanda. She scratched (a foul, usually due to stepping beyond the starting line on the takeoff) on her first attempt and had a best jump of 44 feet 8 inches (13.61 meters), placing twenty-seventh of thirty-five Olympic triple jumpers. "I came away with so many positives that it was easier for the disappointment of my jumps to roll off," Amanda affirms.

“I came away with so many positives that it was easier for the disappointment of my jumps to roll off,”

Understandably, Amanda most respects people who have persevered and realized their dreams. Endurance swimmer Diana Nyad is a case in point. Nyad became the first person to successfully complete the 110-mile swim from Cuba to Florida without the aid of a shark cage—at sixty-four years old. Another inspirational athlete is Yamilé Aldama, a Cuban-born triple jumper who won the 2011 indoor World Championship five months shy of her fortieth birthday.

Meanwhile, Amanda and Greg Smock live in Minneapolis where she is an assistant track and field coach at Macalester College and continues with her triple jump training. She won the bronze medal at the 2013 national championships, won both the indoor and outdoor national championships in 2014 and the national indoor championship in 2015. She is still persevering toward another flight—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016.