

She won the race. Going away. But someone else got the gold medal.

The story of Amanda Gordon's disqualification in the 400m finals at the State Track Meet.

by Dave Featherly

Wile E. Coyote won.

After thousands of times running into the tunnel painted on the side of a mountain, falling off the edge of a cliff, only to have an anvil follow him to the ground and hit him on the head, and assorted other pratfalls and mishaps, old Wile E. Coyote found a way to win.

He DQ'd the Roadrunner.

Amanda "the Roadrunner" Gordon is the Burns High premier sprinter and long jumper.

The state high school track meet is the culmination of the year's track activities and a championship at that meet is the ultimate accomplishment at the high school level. All athletes who have met certain benchmarks are eligible to compete at the Casper meet.

Amanda has competed for Burns in the 100m, 200m, and 400m sprints, and the long jump - for four years. She has consistently put up some of the fastest times and longest distance in Class 2A.

This year was no exception.

There is another premier sprinter in the state. Her name is Maggie Ochsner and she is a freshman from Lingle. Her running style is similar to throwing rice over her opposite shoulder as she runs. But she can also fly. She limits her distances to the 100m and 200m dashes and the 100m hurdles.

In this year's state track meet (held in Casper May 19th-21st), Maggie ran her 100m prelim in 12.9 seconds and Amanda, in a different heat, ran hers in 12.97 seconds.

The 100m finals were run on Saturday and Maggie ran a 12.79 to Amanda's 12.89. Both shaved off about a second.

In the 200m prelims, Amanda turned the tables on the Lingle sprinter. Again in different heats, Amanda ran a 25.44, to Ms. Ochsner's 25.60.

Finals of the 200m race were run after the 400m and, while Maggie's trials time held up, Amanda's didn't. And the Lingle sprinter took her second gold medal (first place) - 25.66 to 25.94.

While many performances in the final track meet of the season are outstanding, none was more exceptional this year than the one by Amanda Gordon in the long jump. Amanda had been held out of the long jump all season, only competing at the 2A regional meet in Gillette so she would qualify for the state competition.



All she did in Casper was jump her class's best - 17 feet, 3 and a half inches. That distance, in only her second competition of the year, was ten inches better than the second longest jump. In fact, only girls in the Class 4A had longer jumps - Amanda's was the longest by eight inches to a foot over the best jumps of Class 1A and Class 3A.

Still, with the sprint distances and long jump obviously to her liking, the 400m is her specialty. The Roadrunner came into Cheyenne for the Okie Blanchard Invitational Track Meet on April 8 and ran a 1:02.03 in the cold. Later in the season, she broke the minute time barrier at the Pine Bluffs Invitational.

It was expected that Amanda's toughest competition in Casper would come from Bradi Nelson, a Pine Bluffs runner. And, in the prelims, that was true. Bradi was the one who broke a minute this time, with Amanda running fast enough to qualify for the finals, but not concerned about winning her heat. In fact, Amanda was lumped with five others within a second and a half of her qualifying time.

The finals of the 400m (girls) was run at 1:00 pm on Saturday, the last day of the meet.

Starting from Lane 5, with a fellow Laramie County sprinter from Pine Bluffs High School, Bradi Nelson, at her left elbow in Lane 4, the familiar orange track jersey showed up in a familiar place very quickly - the front of the pack of eight runners. The fastest times are supposed to start from the preferred lanes

in the middle of the track, unlike the positioning of Lane 7 given Amanda at the Pine Bluffs Invitational.

The officials could make her start from the line in front of the concession stand. By the end of the first straightaway, she'd be stalking the lead.

As I watched two different video tapes of the 400m finals in Casper over and over - in slow motion, backward, forward again and freeze frame - Amanda Gordon's running style is a thing of beauty to see. Unlike the frenetic arm motion of her nemesis Maggie Ochsner, Amanda runs with graceful strides and purpose, as did her county competitor, Bradi Nelson, in the adjoining lane.

I watched the film over and over to see where Amanda had "impeded the progress" of Bradi. A meet official said she had done that by crowding into the lane to her left - presumably almost to the point of shoving Bradi Nelson off stride and out of her own lane.

Nothing like that happened.

Over and over we watched. Did Amanda's foot come down on the lane line? Did it come down in three consecutive strides? What about Bradi's?

Amanda told me that she has run the 400m race more times than she can remember. She began to compete at that distance near the end of her freshman season in Burns. She has run at many tracks, at many levels of competition.

In all of her previous meets, she had never been disqualified.

That was to change in Casper.

Watching the unquestioned grace of these two young girls running stride for

stride, side by side, never touching and never interfering with the other's progress, was not difficult duty. Both were running effortlessly (to the spectator) and both were running very fast. Ms. Nelson has been quoted as saying her objective was to stay with Amanda - knowing that if she could beat the Burns runner, she would win the state championship. And, Bradi ran with her through the area a single official said Amanda had strayed from her lane to the extent that it called for a disqualification.

I could not see it. I could not see that either girl had stepped on the inside lane line once or often. They both were running tight to the line - it saves distance if the line is hugged on the curves. Down the straightaway to the finish line, both girls ran more in the center of their lane.

As both girls, who led the race comfortably at that point, navigated turns three and four, leading to the homestretch, the official who called the disqualification was not watching the runners at the head of the race. He was watching the pack (four or five of the other six runners) behind them - with several yards separating them from the leaders.

He said he had shouted the appropriate warning to runners dangerously close or intruding on a lane divider. He is supposed to holler "LINE!" There is no indication that he spoke anything or that he used his radio to advise of a disqualification. He wrote nothing down to remind him which runner was guilty of a violation. In the area he claimed Amanda had repeatedly violated the next line, he was inattentive to these two runners.

Another track official on the infield side picked up the girls as they got to the head of the straightaway and he WAS attentive. He shifted his position to get the best view. He called nothing. (See p.8.)

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