

Track and Field



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29' 2½" Long Jump: An Impossible Achievement

To say that the history of athletics is studded with magnificent feats is to state the obvious. Yet some athletes have performed so extraordinarily well that they have upset all existing ideas and have played havoc with the predictions of those who like to estimate future human potential.

Bob Beamon is such a man. His performance of 29' 2½" in the Olympic long jump event has been hailed as one of the greatest athletics achievements ever.

It happened on Friday 18 Oct. 1968 in Mexico City. The finalists in the men's long jump were assembling around the approach area. Among the finalists was Bob Beamon who had come through the preliminary heats with a jump of 26' 10½" with his third attempt, although his first two had been no-jumps. He was among the favorites to win the event, possibly with a new world record to replace the existing one which stood at 21' 4¾". At least, that was what the experts were saying. Little did they know what was to come. The first three competitors all had a no-jump. Then it was Beamon's turn. He stripped off his track suit, checked his marks and

looked up at the leaden sky: there was a storm brewing, the air crackled with electricity, the wind blew at 2 metres per second in the direction of the jump; in other words, conditions were good for his first attempt. Beamon accelerated in his normal, seemingly haphazard way; he was a fast runner who had run 100 yards in 9.4 and whose best jump to date was 8.33. The sole of his shoe hit the stopboard, his long lean body rose in the air, his legs pumped, and then he landed in the sand. The jump looked very good. After a seemingly interminable wait, during which the officials checked their measurements several times, it became clear that something extraordinary had just been witnessed. Suddenly, the electronic score panel lit up: 8.90 m, or 29' 2½", an increase of nearly 2 in on the world record, just like that. Before Beamon, there had been no similar increase for 43 years.

BOB BEAMON

Born Aug. 29, 1946, in Jamaica, N.Y.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1968 OG: world record long jump, 29' 2½"
Broke the existing record by 1' 9¾", with one single jump