

Dan Kelly (1883-1920)

By Gary Dielman

On June 23, 1906, at a meet in Spokane, Washington, Dan Kelly, a freckle-faced, redheaded University of Oregon sophomore from Baker City, stunned the track-and-field world. Running under the sponsorship of the Multnomah Athletic Club in Portland, Kelly broke the sixteen-year-old 100-yard dash world record, sprinting the distance in 9.6 seconds. He then won the broad jump with a Northwest record leap of 23 feet 9½ inches and equaled the world record for the 220-yard dash with a time of 21.2 seconds.

Coach William Hayward, just beginning his forty-four-year career at the University of Oregon, predicted that the young track star's record would last a long time. Kelly's world record in the 100-yard dash was not broken for twenty-three years and during those years was equaled by only four sprinters. Since 1992, Dan Kelly's athletic achievements have been honored in the University of Oregon's Athletic Hall of Fame. And in 1980, Kelly was in the first group of nine track-and-field athletes inducted into the newly organized Oregon Sports Hall of Fame and Museum in Portland.

Daniel James Kelly was born on September 1, 1883, in Pueblo, Colorado, but he grew up in Baker City, where he worked in his father's blacksmith shop. In 1904, Kelly attended Columbia University (now University of Portland). The 5-foot-10½-inch, 150-pound athlete set school records in the 50-, 100-, and 220-yard dashes and competed in the high jump, shot put, and hammer throw.

In the fall of 1905, Kelly transferred to the University of Oregon to study law. He played halfback on the football team and, under the tutelage of Coach Hayward, was a standout sprinter and broad jumper. After breaking the 100-yard dash record in the spring of 1906, Kelly never again equaled his world record. In 1907, Hayward took Kelly to the national championships in Jamestown, Virginia, where he finished fifth in the 100.

But the versatile Kelly, a terrific broad jumper, was not out of the national competition. The previous year, at a meet between University of Oregon and Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University), Kelly jumped 24 feet 2¼ inches, making him one of only three American athletes to exceed 24 feet. At Jamestown, Kelly won the broad jump with a leap of 23 feet 9½ inches. Oregon had its first national title and, in Kelly, its first All American athlete.

In 1908, Kelly and Hayward traveled to the Olympics in London, where Kelly won a silver medal with a broad jump of 23 feet 3¼ inches. Back in Oregon, Kelly received a hero's welcome in his hometown and in Portland.

During the 1909 track season, Kelly was laid up with injuries, which signaled the end of his short but amazing preeminence in track and field. He returned to Baker City to work for a number of years in his father's business and then went to Canada as a logger. He died there of pneumonia on April 8, 1920, and is buried in Baker City.

Sources

Dan Kelly - Track & Field. Oregon Sports Hall of Fame.

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