

# UCLA Starts Fast: Connolly Wins

By MAL FLORENCE, *Times Staff Writer*

BATON ROUGE, La.—UCLA's Jim Connolly had more than his competition to contend with in the NCAA decathlon Thursday night at Bernie Moore Stadium.

He also had the elements, on a night when thunder, lightning and rain harassed the athletes at times.

Connolly was trailing George Mason's Rob Muzzio and LSU's Sheldon Blockburger by 191 and 132 points, respectively, at the outset of the pole vault, the third event on the second night of the competition.

"I knew I had to make up points in the pole vault because Muzzio and Blockburger were already out at an earlier height," Connolly said, "but I was vaulting into a headwind and an approaching storm."

Connolly made up points with a vault of 15 feet 1 inch on his last attempt. Then, he made up some more points in the javelin with an American decathlon record throw of 229-7—again on his last effort.

Finally, he held off Muzzio in the final event, the 1,500 meters, and won the NCAA decathlon with a personal best score of 8,121 points.

Muzzio, who had won the NCAA decathlon in 1984 and 1985, was second with 8,061 points, while BYU's Keith Robinson was third with 7,967.

Connolly's win was not only a personal breakthrough for him after he had seriously considered quitting the event last year, but it improved UCLA's prospects of winning the team title.

Connolly, son of former Olympic gold medalists, Harold and Olga Connolly, made his contribution with 10 points in the first final of the men's competition.

Otherwise, the Bruins qualified everyone as expected and are in a

good position to win their first outright championship since 1973.

"The pole vault was the turning point," Connolly said. "Then, after the javelin, I was in first place and it's much more reassuring to be ahead going into the last event."

Muzzio, bothered by a knee injury incurred during the high jump Wednesday, needed to beat Connolly by nine seconds in the 1,500 to claim the championship again.

They were matched together in the second heat. Connolly was a few steps ahead of Muzzio going into the final straightaway and he held his advantage to the finish even though Robinson won the heat.

Connolly was third after the first five events Wednesday, but in good position to make a move.

He opened up with a personal best time of 14.64 seconds in the 110-meter high hurdles, but then lagged in the discus with a throw of 133-5.

"Right after the discus I was afraid, but my coach [Allan Hancckel] said that I was still doing very well," Connolly said. "In the decathlon, once an event is over, you can't think about it any more. I just said to myself, 'Now I'm a pole vaulter.'"

Connolly's previous best score was 7,771 points.

Connolly plans to relax a bit in nearby New Orleans today and then will have to concentrate on getting ready for the TAC decathlon later this month in San Jose. That meet qualifies athletes for the World Championships at Rome Aug. 29-Sept. 6.

UCLA Coach Bob Larsen is cautiously confident that his Bruins will make a good showing in final events today and Saturday.

Other contenders, such as Texas A&M and Texas, have had setbacks in qualifying. For example, Texas' James Lott, the defending NCAA high jump champion, couldn't make the qualifying height of 7-1 Thursday.

Individually, the 400-meter final figures to be the hottest event of the meet—and favored Butch Reynolds of Ohio State put some heat on his competition in a qualifying race.

Reynolds was timed in 44.43 seconds, and he made it look easy.

He set a stadium record and was close to the NCAA meet record of 44.30 set by Washington State's Gabriel Tiaoch last year.

Reynolds has recorded a time of 44.09 this season, fastest ever at sea level.

Other heat winners in the 400 didn't exactly have shabby times.

UCLA's Danny Everett and Arkansas' Roddie Haley had times of 45.13 and 45.44, respectively, setting up what most assuredly will be a fast final Saturday.

## NCAA Notes

UCLA's Gail Devers has a limited schedule, for her, in this meet. The versatile athlete won her heat in the 100 meters at 11.32 and then anchored the 1,600-meter relay team to fourth place and a qualifying spot. . . . USC's women were impressive in winning their 1,600 heat in the school-record time of 3:30.3. "I like our position," USC Coach Fred LaPlante said. "Everyone who should be in the finals made it."

UCLA's Steve Kerho won his heat in the 110-meter high hurdles with a time of 13.63, and beat Keith Talley, the 1986 champion in the process. . . . USC's Fanchu Morales, the Pacific 10 champion, got a bad start and finished sixth in his heat in the 100 in the wind-aided time of 10.31. Nevertheless, he qualified for the final because it was such a fast heat. TCU's Raymond Stewart won in 10.12, while UCLA's Mike Marsh was impressive in second place at 10.16.

