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GOLD AT LAST

There Wasn't Any Doubt

USA's Clay Wins In Decathlon

From Journal Wires

BEIJING — There was no celebration after the completion of the decathlon.

The newest "World's Greatest Athlete" — Bryan Clay — knew before the event's final race that all he'd have to do to win the gold medal was finish.

Clay finished and about five feet, if that much, beyond the finish line, the 28-year-old lay down on the track rapidly taking deep breaths.

No victory lap. No parading around with the American flag draped over his body. Clay was helped up a couple of minutes later.

And on wobbly legs, he walked about 50 meters, kissed his wife and hugged his coaches.

Clay, who won a silver medal at the Athens Olympics and the 2005 World Championship, finished with 8,791 points, 240 better than Belarus' Andrei Krauchanka and 264 points better than Cuba's Leonel Suarez.

"The first time I saw Bryan was in Paris in 2003," Roman Sebrle said. Sebrle was the reigning Olympic decathlon champion. "I think he was injured, and I just looked at him and thought, 'He's not so tall, and will never be the beast he is now.' That was a mistake."

Clay finished first or second in five of the 10 events and was third in two others. Clay was 23rd out of 26 competitors in the 1,500-meter run, the last event of the two-day decathlon.

The 1,500 was a formality by the time it came around. Clay had already built up a sizeable lead.

"I've been telling people that I'm in the best shape of my life," Clay said. "I really am. I've been training incredibly hard. ... You might not be able to tell by some of the results, but when you take into account everything we've had to go through the last two days, I think I did well."

"I'm very pleased with my score. Of course I'm pleased with the medal and the title that comes with the medal. I can't tell you how happy I am to have worked for something for so long, and finally accomplish it, and have my dreams come true. I'm hoping to continue to do this through 2012. I hopefully can get another medal. I don't know if anybody's got three (decathlon) medals at the Olympic Games. That's maybe another goal."

NO DROPS: After the U.S. men's and women's 400-meter relay teams both dropped the baton and missed the event's final, a huge emphasis was placed on having sticky fingers.

There were no drops as the U.S. men's and women's 1,600 relay teams safely made it to the finals.

The men finished first in their heat qualifying in 2 minutes, 59.98 seconds.

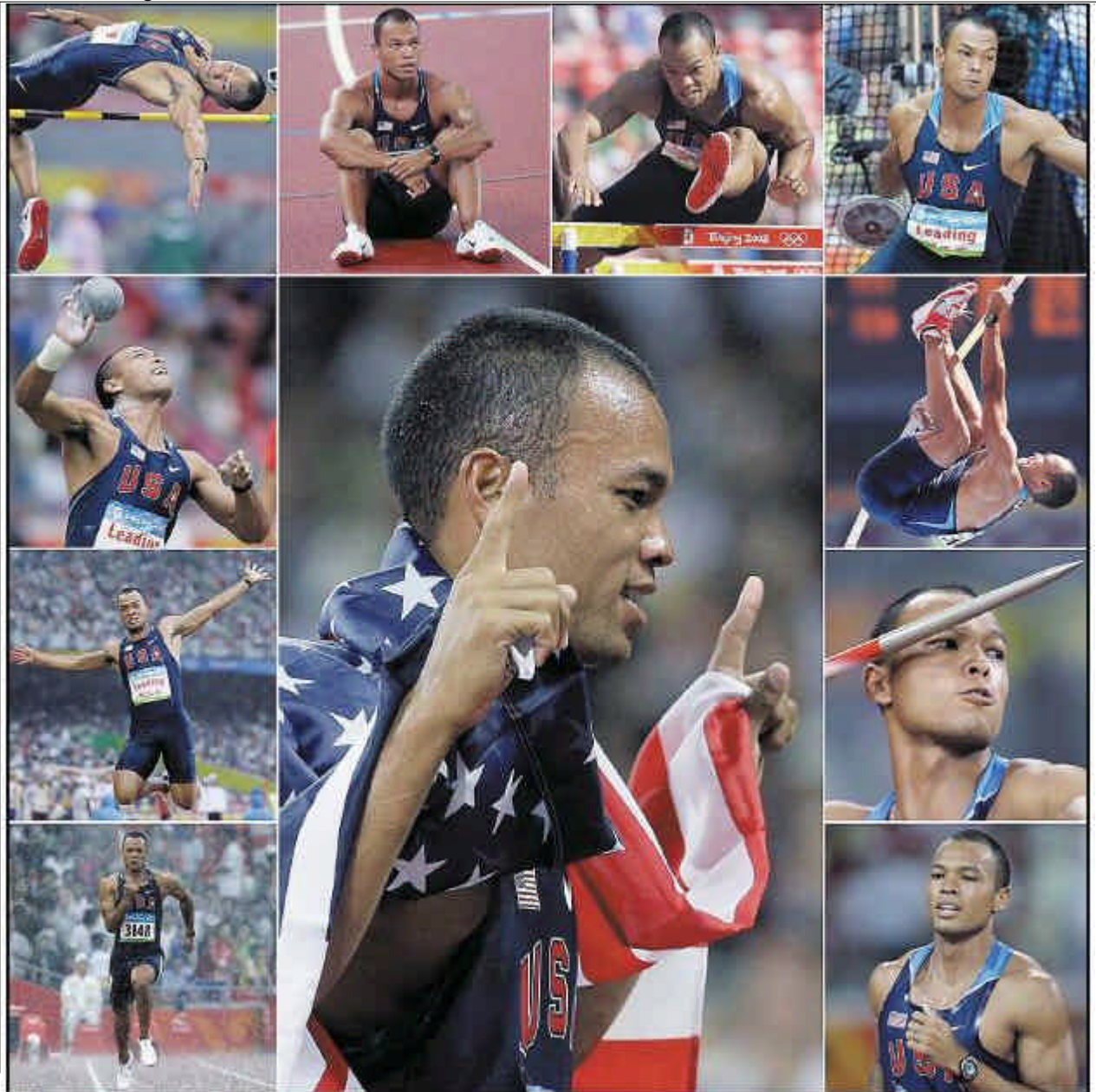
Russia was second in the heat at 3:00.14. Great Britain had the fastest qualifying time, 2:59.33. The Bahamas was right behind them, finishing in 2:59.88.

"It went really well," Kerron Clement said. "We focused on good, safe baton passes today. We want to redeem ourselves."

The women's team qualified with a season best of 3:22.45 — 0.15 of a second faster than Jamaica.

"We got the baton around the track safely," Mary Wineberg said.

"There always are good situations that come out of every circle. The important thing tomorrow is to run the best we can and win a gold medal. We missed out on a couple of gold medals. It's up to both the men and women to get the baton around the track."



THE ASSOICATED PRESS In this combination of 11 photos. U.S. gold-medal-winning decathlete Bryan Clay celebrates his overall win, center. He also is scene in the event's 10 disciplines.