



Olympics: Brigetta Barrett wins silver medal

LONDON — Brigetta Barrett worried that if a moment came like Saturday, when she medaled in high jump at the Olympics, her mother might not be there to share it with her.

That's why immediately after winning a silver medal with a personal-best leap of 6 feet, 8 inches, the former Dutchess County resident and University of Arizona senior was so insistent about locating Lottie Barrett among the 80,000 people at Olympic Stadium on the final night of track and field competition at the London Games.

"She's been through so much, treatment after treatment battling breast cancer," an emotional Barrett said. "My mom kept telling me don't worry, I'm not claiming this disease. I was scared for a while that she wouldn't be here to share this moment with me. But my mom is such an amazing woman. She's a fighter, and she was telling me how to fight. That's why I needed to see her."

Lottie Barrett completed chemotherapy treatments on July 18. "I consider my mom a survivor," said Brigetta, who has a twin sister, Shawn-De, who lives in New York City and an older sister, Takiya Ross, who lives in Poughkeepsie

Barrett overcame first-attempt misses at 6-5½, 6-6¾ and 6-8 to clear each of those heights and take second place between Russians Anna Chicherova at 6-8¾, who won gold, and Svetlana Shkolina, who had one more miss than Barrett at 6-8 and took bronze.

Barrett is the first American woman to medal in the high jump since Louise Ritter's gold in 1988 in Seoul. She jumped higher than any U.S. collegian in history, even though the mark formally will not count as an NCAA record.

Barrett's medal is the first for anyone to spend 10 or more years in Dutchess or Ulster county since Hyde Park's Patrick Manning won a silver medal in rowing in 1992 in Barcelona. Four others share that distinction.

Barrett was born in the Bronx and spent time in Poughkeepsie and Beacon before settling in Wappingers Falls, where she attended school through the end of 10th grade, winning a state indoor high jump

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title in 2007. She moved to Duncanville, Texas, for her final two years of high school, winning two state titles. She is coached by assistant Sheldon Blockburger at Arizona, where she twice has swept NCAA indoor and outdoor titles and is a finalist for the Bowerman Award as collegiate Athlete of the Year. Barrett described Blockburger as a surrogate father, since she grew up with a single parent.

“Brigetta competed her heart out today,” Blockburger told the Poughkeepsie Journal. “She told me when she showed up at the warm-up track that she was going to medal. She was very confident. Warm-ups went a little rough, but every jump got better and better and she got more confident. She has been a pleasure to work with. I hope she made Poughkeepsie proud today.”

The medal is the first for an Arizona track athlete since Sandra Farmer-Patrick (silver, 400 hurdles) and Michael Bates (bronze, 200 meters) in 1992. Tanya Hughes was 11th in high jump for the Wildcats in Barcelona.

“I’m not going to lie; I kind of blacked out” attempting 6-8, Barrett said. “I was very scared. I know this is what we do, and people don’t really expect us to be afraid of a bar. There’s a moment between step seven and eight where I have to decide if I’m really going to go for this jump or not. I was just like go for it and trust yourself and trust God. I put my foot down and closed my eyes and when I hit that mat without

hitting the bar, I was like, ‘Thank you Jesus.’ ”

At a press conference after receiving her medal, Barrett, a theatre arts major, broke into the gospel song “I’m Available to You” when asked what she was singing during the competition.

Chicherova said Barrett asked her and others to pray together in the call room before they entered the stadium. “It was a little unusual,” the Russian admitted. “She was so sincere and touching. I see more light (in Barrett). If you’re sincere in your beliefs, it helps you.”

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