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Fredonia native Jenn Suhr wins Olympic title

GOOD AS GOLD!

Emotions flow after dramatic victory
By Craig Harvey

Jennifer Suhr, Olympic gold medalist.

The Fredonia native outlasted a field of 12 pole vaulters Monday in the London Olympics to claim the coveted prize.

Suhr, despite being unable to clear 4.8 meters (15-feet, 7-inches), captured first place after Cuba's Yarisley Silva was also unable to clear the same mark. Suhr won the tie-breaker because Silva had one more miss in the competition.

"It's very emotional. It's something that you work so hard for, for four years, and heartbreak and joy, and then some more heartbreak," Suhr told the Associated Press. "To overcome it and come out on top is something that whenever I thought of I started crying, so I knew it was going to be emotional, whenever I thought about how it would feel to win gold. Then I would think how it would feel to be fourth, and I'd cry over that too. It was definitely something that I've wanted. I don't think I've ever wanted anything so bad."

Suhr's victory ended Russia's Yelena Isinbayeva's bid for a third straight Olympic gold medal.

"To beat Yelena and her resume and her records, it's an honor," Suhr told the AP. "That's the only thing I can say, to have someone so good in the field and come out on top, it really is an honor. It's a special title in that situation."

With the bar set at 4.7 meters (15.42 feet), five pole vaulters remained — Suhr, Silva, Isinbayeva, Germany's Martina Strutz and Silke Spiegelburg. Strutz bowed out after being unable to clear the mark. Suhr, Silva and Isinbayeva cleared the height on their first attempt and Spiegelburg deferred to the next mark after she was unable to clear 4.7.

With the bar raised to 4.75 meters, Spiegelburg was eliminated after being unable to clear the mark.

With Spiegelburg out, Suhr was guaranteed at least a bronze

Suhr and Silva both missed on their first attempt at 4.75, but cleared the bar on their second attempt. Isinbayeva failed to clear 4.75 twice, and elected to pass to 4.8.

There, Suhr missed her first attempt.

Suhr could be seen talking to her coach, telling him, "I had to power through the wind That was a head wind."

Silva also failed to clear 4.8 and Isinbayeva was eliminated after not clearing 4.8 after her first try.

With a gold medal in sight, Suhr could not power through the wind and rain again as she was unable to clear the bar. However, Silva could not clear 4.8, and because she had more faults than Suhr throughout the competition, the 2000 Fredonia graduate was awarded the gold medal.

"It's terrific. I couldn't pick better representation for the United States of American than to have Jenn out there with the American flag," Jenn's father, Mark Stuczynski told WDOE. "She's really worked hard, she sacrificed a lot It was a real good match and that's what it's all about."

"I am beside myself," Jenn's mother Sue Stuczynski told WDOE. "I am so happy for her and Rick. They have worked so hard. Rick knows what he is doing. And he knew Jenn was the best when everyone else counted her out."

Residents, area leaders celebrate feat

By Shirley Pulawski

The community is swelling with pride at the news that local Olympian Jenn (Stuczynski) Suhr, won the gold medal in Monday's pole vaulting competition in London.

Fredonia Central School Superintendent Paul DiFonzo said he was so gripped by the competition, he simply could not bring himself to leave his office to go home and watch the live stream with his family.

“My secretary and all of the people in the office went home to watch. I was afraid I was going to miss something so I stayed. I ended up being there all by myself when she won and I ended up crying watching her carry that flag,” DiFonzo explained.

The victory is shared by many, DiFonzo noted. “I am elated. I am elated for her; I am elated for her husband, her family and all of Fredonia.”

“We’re so proud of her. She’s a shining star. She made Fredonia proud and today, she made the whole country proud,” he said.

When asked if any celebratory events had yet been planned, DiFonzo said, “I know there is going to be a celebration. I haven’t had a chance to celebrate with anyone yet. We’re proud of Jenn, whether she won gold or silver or bronze. We’re proud that she was just able to compete.”

Village of Fredonia Mayor Stephen Keefe, who was out of town for the weekend and returned just after the win, did not hold back his happiness.

“Wooho! Outstanding! Isn’t it just the best news you’ve ever heard?” he asked. “I just pulled in and somebody left me a message.... It’s just fantastic,” he said.

Like DiFonzo, Keefe is interesting in holding an event to celebrate the victory. “I think we certainly should plan some kind of celebration. I’d like to see us do an event. I think a celebration and some kind of ceremony is certainly in order.

Keefe would also like to see a permanent reminder of the victory in the village. “I know one of the things I’d also like to see us do is work on some permanent signage at the entrance to the village.

Ann LaDuca, Suhr’s former high school teacher, gushed with pride at the success of her former student. “Oh, my gosh. What a thrill. What a thrill! I could not be happier,” she said.

LaDuca, like many in the area, watched live streaming of the event from a computer. “In fact, I was watching it with the phys. ed. teacher who took my place,” she said. Suhr graduated from Fredonia Central School with LaDuca’s own daughter in 2000. LaDuca said she knew the athlete was headed for bigger things. “I knew she was outstanding. She was just an outstanding athlete. She was an outstanding student. She is a six-footer. She asked to play against the boys. The girls couldn’t challenge her. She was head and shoulders over everyone in so many ways. ... I am thrilled for her,” LaDuca beamed.

Suhr is also more than just a fine athlete, according to LaDuca. “She is just a really, really neat girl. She’s down to earth, a hard worker, and the kind of person you want wonderful things to happen to.”

At the Dunkirk Common Council meeting Monday evening, council members erupted into applause. Councilman Michael Michalski noted many Dunkirk residents are related to Suhr. Councilwoman Stephanie Kiyak asked if any of the officials in attendance were related to the gold medalist. “I’m happy to announce my cousin just won a gold medal,” said Dunkirk Police Chief David Ortolano.

However, area residents don’t need to know Jenn personally to be excited by the win.

Fredonia resident Carrie Crockett said she’s definitely moved by the performance and local enthusiasm surrounding the golden victory. “I don’t know her personally but I think it’s amazing and something to definitely be proud of.”

Forestville resident Michelle Merritt said she is thrilled by the victory, but it wasn’t unexpected. “Not surprised at all. She is such a superb athlete and still the best pole vaulter in the world. Fredonia should be proud.”

Jody Briggs, Dunkirk native and Resource Development Director for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo, had a strong positive reaction. “As I listened to the WDOE broadcast from my office and was cheering for Jenn, my co-workers couldn’t help but join in with me. Having someone from our small community win an Olympic gold medal is utterly amazing. Let this be a motivation to our young people – you, too, can obtain your dreams. Set your goals high and the sky’s the limit!”