

Olympian Returns Home For Jumping Display

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By Andrew David Kuczkowski, Post-Journal

FREDONIA - In front of an exuberant crowd at SUNY Fredonia on Saturday, Jenn Suhr did it. Though it was in her fourth attempt, Suhr came to Fredonia to do one thing and one thing only and that's to give her hometown something special. She cleared the bar at 16 feet, 5 inches, just short of breaking the women's world indoor pole vaulting record of 16-5.5, which she already owns.

It was a feat that she didn't accomplish in Rio de Janeiro in the 2016 Summer Olympic games. However, this vault, now that she is fully healthy and with no prior training, was one inch higher than the winning vault this past summer. In Fredonia, it was gold medal worthy.



Jenn Suhr celebrates after a successful pole vault. Photo by Joe Conti

"I don't want to cry. It's so special to come here and have this support to be able to put on a show," Suhr said after the event.

The atmosphere was not like the Olympics. Suhr was vaulting with other New York locals. One was Erica Ellis from the Rochester area, who broke the New York State record for 15-year-olds at the event. All competitors, well, didn't act like competitors. When others were setting up for their run, they clapped along with the crowd.

"It's nice to just be able to come out and jump and have people wanting you to make bars and be in a group of athletes that you want to do well with," Suhr said. "And to be out here with friends and family and to be out here so close to home, it puts so much more energy and emotion into it. I think in the next four years and going into 2020, I've got to learn to jump like this and enjoy the process."

Suhr noted that a performance at Fredonia was a guarantee. Performing among the hometown faithful pulled her in. Yet, the original location, outside at Barker Common, was unfortunately a no-go with the weather.



Olympic pole vaulter and Fredonia native Jenn Suhr clears the bar during an exhibition Saturday at SUNY Fredonia. Photo by Joe Conti

"Man, it likes to rain here, though, so we had to move it inside," she said. "Four years ago we had trouble with it. (This year) we didn't want to battle with it. (SUNY Fredonia) was generous enough to let us use their facility and, as you can see, they provided such a good entertainment for us."

And when it comes to future events, Suhr already has plans of how it will continue.

"But we want to make it more of a community thing where it's a kids clinic next year," she said, "so we want to make this an annual thing where (they can) come down and have a long jump and pole vaulting and jumping."

A hometown could mean something completely different from one athlete to the next. For Suhr, Fredonia gives that unconditional love.

"You don't realize it until something happens like it did at Rio," Suhr said of the support from Fredonia. "In 2012, it seemed like I had a lot of friends. You know, you win gold and all of a sudden you have tons of friends. But all of a sudden when things don't go well, you realize who your true friends are. And it's this area, it's Western New York. I really learned where the love comes from."

Being that it's the fall of 2016, it's nearly four full years until the next Summer Olympic games. So what's next Jenn Suhr?

"What's next? I'm on vacation right now. So that's what's next."