

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1280 Are You Ready to “Flop” in Your Job and Career?

He revolutionized a sports event, changing forever how it would be done. He set records along the way, including one at the Olympics. I'm Jerry Roberts, and today we look back on the life of a man who not only brought change to his chosen sport, but lessons for us on how we can do the same. That's next on The Extra Point.

It was the 1960s and in the world of track and field, the sport was dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. In the 1960 Rome games, the USSR ran away with the team medal count. In 1964, in Tokyo, it was almost a tie with the Russians winning the team count 93-90. This was at the height of the Cold War, nuclear testing, and the space race.

In those times, the event known as the high jump had been performed the same way for as long as one could remember. It was called the Straddle Method, where the athlete jumped over the bar, facing down, then trying to avoid touching the bar as he came down.

A slender kid from Oregon named Dick Fosbury wasn't very good at that way of jumping, so he invented another way of doing it.

Using his engineering knowledge, he began to go over the bar backwards, head first, not leg first, arched his back and kicked his legs up to avoid the bar. It was weird, but effective.

Fosbury first went to this different technique due to his high school using foam pieces in the landing pit where the jumpers came down. Almost every other pit had wood chips and sawdust, and Fosbury wouldn't have wanted to go headfirst into that.

So, Fosbury used the change to his advantage. He won the NCAA high jump title in 1968, won the Olympic trials, and then faced the world's best high jumpers in the Mexico City Olympic Games. Fosbury used his style to break the Olympic record and take the gold medal. He had no idea what would come next.

People ridiculed him, saying he was a lazy jumper, and that his way was surely a fad, and wouldn't stick. One newspaper said that he looked like "a fish flopping in a boat." That gave Fosbury's method a name, and it would forever be called the "Fosbury Flop."

Within 10 years, The Fosbury Flop became the default method of competing in the high jump. Some 55 years later, it remains so.

The thing is, Fosbury had been this ordinary but tall teenager, interested in the high jump, but not very good at it using the traditional ways.

In fact, he had failed to clear the height required to participate in a high school track meet in his sophomore year. That's one big world away from standing on the winning platform at the Olympics, having a medal placed around your neck, and hearing our national anthem play.

He had an idea, and that idea changed the entire philosophy of a sport — just by doing it differently. He turned conventional wisdom on its ear.

Dick Fosbury died of cancer a couple of days ago, at the age of 76. Besides his innovation in the high jump, he left us with a valuable lesson.

We all want to master the best practices for our chosen line of work. It's a good thing when we do that. However, even best practices can be improved upon. What changes would you make in your work that might become the new best practice? We can thank Dick Fosbury and his famous flop for a little inspiration today.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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