

Overcoming Obstacles

An Interview with Bob Beamon,
Chief Executive Officer, Beamon Communications Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Bob Beamon is an American track and field athlete, best known for his world record in the long jump at the Mexico Olympics in 1968. He broke the existing record by a margin of 55 cm (21¾ in.) and his world record stood for almost 23 years until it was broken in 1991. Beamon began his college career at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University before transferring to the University of Texas at El Paso. In 1965, he set a national high school triple jump record and was second in the nation in the long jump. In 1967, he won the AAU indoor title and earned a silver medal at the Pan American Games, both in the long jump. Shortly after the Mexico City Olympics, Beamon was drafted by the Phoenix Suns in the 15th round of the 1969 NBA draft. In 1972, he graduated from Adelphi University with a degree in sociology. Beamon has worked in various roles to promote youth athleticism, including collaborations with former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. He is a graphic artist with work exhibited by the Art of the Olympians and is the former chief executive of the Art of the Olympians Museum. Beamon is CEO of Beamon Communications Inc. (beamoncommunications.com).

In 2018, you will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of your Olympic gold medal with the longest standing record in Olympic history. What does that means to you?

Once I had set my sights on Olympic competition and had made the team, my thought was that I had some very strong competition. If I could come home with a gold and beat not just the top guys but also the other 10 or 15 guys in the finals, I would feel very proud of that accomplishment.

It turned out that I broke the Olympic record by three feet and then broke the world record by two feet. That was an incredible feeling because I didn't go in looking to break any records – I wanted to win a gold medal.

I thought I would wake up to find it was a dream, but standing on the podium as the recipient of the gold medal in the 1968 Olympic Games was a blessing.

One wouldn't think that some 50 years later that record would still stand. Is there a time when you thought that might be possible, and when advances in training mean



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that records don't last long, why have yours been so hard to break?

I jumped that distance and coming out of my daze from it, I realized that I had two more jumps and other people had three more jumps, so I wasn't feeling I would walk away with the win with such a large margin between the second and third place finishers. I felt I needed to be on my toes until the competition ended.

I didn't believe the records would last this long because I felt they might be broken in a matter of minutes at the time. I did get the feeling that the Olympics is really not a place to try to break a world record, but if it comes, it comes.



Bob Beamon at the Special Olympics Cayman Islands Track & Field Clinic in January 2017

One needs to go in with the idea that those who make it to the Olympics are great athletes, so one has to be greater. I had to be ready to outjump the next person who would jump more than 29 feet. I was capable of going 30 feet on that day.

I was so excited, and yet the distance had gotten to me. I couldn't think or even jump. I was so emotional that I forgot that I needed to jump twice more. Every so often, I'd pinch myself and remind myself that I was in the lead.

I really appreciate my record more now than I did in 1968. I feel so blessed. We had the greatest Olympic team ever assembled. Records were broken in just about every event that Americans participated in. They had some incredible times and, as of today, many of those times and distances are still very competitive.

With that type of record, it would seem to bring you a voice to talk about issues and to support causes important to you. What direction has your post-Olympics path taken, and what are the areas you're focused on?

It keeps me excited that I've been able to go through the years and people still remember that jump. We've had so many great jumpers since then too.

I've always been interested in working with children in disadvantaged situations. They are often the kids that people say aren't going to make it. I look at them as being underdogs. They are, in many cases, the kids who are written off and don't even anticipate growing up and becoming adults in some instances. Some of them just want to make it to the next day. Kids in certain areas are losing their lives because of things like gang violence.

I try to mix my own experience in overcoming obstacles with some of the things I've come across in my later years that relate to making myself a better person. I incorporate those ideas into my presentations to youth.

I also look for other opportunities to work with people. For instance, I'm a goodwill ambassador for the Special Olympics. They will celebrate their 50th year in 2018. My older brother was in the Special Olympics so I have a connection there. I'm thrilled to be a part of that organization.

What is the secret to your sustained success and enthusiasm for life?

The difference between the Olympics then and now is that technology has taken over. During my time, the only media exposure was ABC Sports, and they just happened to catch my jump.

When we deal with the Olympics today, we deal with technology. We even have athletes that go through psychological counseling to ensure they stay focused.

We were discussing the reason my record still stands, particularly given all of these things athletes have available today. Every now and then, there may be a situation that creates an incredible athlete – Usain Bolt is at the head of the class right now, as are people like Michael Phelps. The technology has something to do with it, but it's also how we train and how we look at life in general.

It's about staying healthy. When I was involved in the sport, I gave up a lot, but I also saw too many of my colleagues fall by the wayside. Ninety percent of the people I associated with in high school are all deceased and they didn't necessarily pass in a good way.

Focus and commitment have to remain strong in order for someone to maintain themselves. ●