

Freshman an Unlikely Olympian



Just two days before beginning classes this semester, freshman Haley Nemra returned from China where she had competed in the Olympics on behalf of the Marshall Islands.

For Nemra, 19, running the women's 800 meters was more about representing her father's homeland than it was about running to win. Certainly, she wanted to be competitive, but she also knew she would be up against the world's best runners and that she would be running to make the tiny nation proud.

"When I was in the warm-up area, I thought, 'I can't turn back now,'" said Nemra, who is running cross country and track for the USF. "I told myself,

name caught the attention of officials hoping to build up the country's athletic programs.

During her junior year in high school, Nemra accepted an invitation to compete for the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific Games in American Samoa and won bronze medals in the 800 and 1,500 meters. Island representatives casually mentioned the Olympics at that time, but Nemra didn't think much of it. Three weeks after she graduated from high school in Marysville, Wash., Nemra learned the Marshall Islands would field a team at the Beijing Olympics and that they wanted her to represent them (obtaining dual citizenship and a Marshallese passport made it possible).

Already in the midst of training for her cross country season at USF, Nemra had to switch gears and focus more on speed rather than putting in the miles. She acknowledges she wasn't at the peak of her track training when she competed, but the experience of being at the Olympics made up for that.

"I just couldn't stop smiling," she said. "I was thinking, 'I can't believe I'm actually here.'"

Nemra was the first current or former USF

student-athlete to compete in the Olympic Games since former Diamond Don David Sheldon competed on the Italian Baseball Team in the 1996 Atlanta Games. Nemra is the university's second Olympian to compete in track and field and first since USF legend Ollie Matson won silver in the 4x400 relay and a bronze in the 440 in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland.

While Nemra's focus is now on her collegiate career, London is in the back of her mind. She hopes the Marshall Islands will invite her to represent them during the 2012 Olympics.

She also has another wish—to someday visit the island nation that sent her to the Olympics. **USF**



Chance of a Lifetime:

Freshman Haley Nemra wore the Marshall Islands' traditional dress during the Olympic opening ceremony. After her event, Nemra visited the sights, including the Great Wall of China (right).

"I'm going to run, I've run many 800s in my life. Of course, this is the biggest in the world."

Nemra, who has never been to the Marshall Islands, finished the preliminaries with a time of 2:18:83, five seconds off from her personal best. She did not advance to the next round.

Still, she said, "I can't really get too disappointed." After all, she points out, it was a chance to compete on the largest athletic stage in the world.

Her father, who is originally from the Marshall Islands, routinely sent newspaper clippings about Nemra's running accomplishments to relatives back home. They often sent the articles to the local newspaper, which would then write about her. Soon, Nemra's