



U.S. Olympic Pentathlete Team Leader Jim Gregory ('92) in front of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Alternative Olympic Dreams

Jim Gregory ('92) down under

For Jim Gregory ('92), the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, were, at first, bittersweet. But, oh how good news can help one swallow a bitter pill.

First, Gregory qualified for the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Team and the 2000 Olympic Games, but a ruling by the International Federation for Modern Pentathlon deemed that each country could only send two competitors to vie for pentathlon gold. Jim was qualified third in the United States. "It's pretty frustrating to be an alternate, since I was qualified for the actual Games," says Gregory. "The toughest part is knowing that I beat out over half of the 24 men competing in the Olympics when I was up against them at the 2000 World Pentathlon Championships."

Gregory did get to travel "down under" with the U.S. pentathletes though, since he was named team leader in July. Gregory has competed in modern pentathlons for seven years and finished 10th at the 2000 world championships in Italy last June. "Tenth in the world and third in the United States is a great feeling," says Gregory, who also qualified as an Olympic alternate in 1996, though he didn't get to travel to Atlanta. "Of course it would have been very sweet to travel to Sydney as an athlete," adds Gregory, a former JMU swim team member, "but experiencing the Olympics in Australia was very moving."

Gregory had to fill out a "resumÉ" of sorts to be selected as team leader, but his experiences as an Army Officer and team leader for the Military World Championship Pentathlon Team also helped get him selected. "I've been an assistant fencing coach at the U.S. Air Force Academy, which probably helped," adds Gregory, "and being a qualified alternate certainly didn't hurt."

In order of competition, modern pentathletes compete in five events, including shooting (10 meters, air pistol), fencing (epee), a 200-meter swim, an equestrian jumper course, and a 3000-meter run. The Olympic event is called "modern" pentathlon because there was an ancient Olympic pentathlon competition consisting of running, jumping, spear throwing, discus and wrestling.

As team leader of the U.S. modern pentathletes, Gregory coordinated travel for the team to the team processing headquarters in San Diego, as well as to and from Sydney. In addition, he secured equipment and uniforms for the team for all five events. In Sydney, he coordinated practice times, made sure everyone was where they were supposed to be at the correct times, and tended to athletes' other varied needs. He also served as liaison between the U.S.A. Pentathlon and U.S. Olympic Committees, making sure that all of the proper paperwork was completed and that the flow of information was smooth and accurate.

Gregory has served in the Army since 1992 and is currently stationed at Ft. Carson, Colo., where he is a captain and resident athlete at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. This year, he was elected as the athlete representative for the sport of modern pentathlon on the U.S. Olympic Commission's Athlete Advisory Committee. He is the officer-in-charge of the Army World Class Athlete Program's Modern Pentathlon Team.

"My primary duty is to train for the Olympic Games," says Gregory, "but it is important that I maintain proficiency in my regular job. I began my career as a field artillery officer, but switched to the Medical Service Corps." Gregory has also finished the Special Forces Assessment and Selection Course

and will be training to be a Special Forces Officer for the next year and a half.

"The Olympic opening ceremonies was the most amazing thing I have ever seen," he says. "You prepare yourself by knowing that it will be huge, but there is no way you can understand what walking into a stadium with 110,000 cheering people feels like until you do it. It was overwhelming; the energy was through the roof. And, being team leader was much harder than competing for me. I've trained mentally to compete at the highest levels, but being team leader was a completely different experience. I rode the roller coaster of emotions. Its easy to control yourself when it's only you to worry about, but when you're concerned about the team as a whole, there is a lot more distracting ups and downs. I had to learn to keep my personal feelings subdued and to ensure that my teammates stayed on an even keel."

The team leader is very proud of the U.S. pentathletes. "We had real medal hopes for everyone and came painfully close in the men's competition. After some tough luck, Chad Senior finished sixth and Velizar Iliev finished ninth. The women's event was exciting and historical, since it was the first time women competed in the Olympic pentathlon. Emily DeRiel won the silver medal and Mary Beth Lagorashvili finished fourth. It was truly rewarding for me to see the team be as prepared as they were, and I am proud of all of the athletes, because they truly gave their all."

Story by Michelle Hite ('88)