

Soaring onto U.S. Olympic Team, Brittney Reese Remains Humble, Yet Fierce

Contributed by Tobie Baker
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Brittney Reese works out Thursday (July 17) at the Ole Miss Track and Field complex. UM photo by Tobie Baker.

OXFORD, Miss. - Three Harley Davidson Sportsters lined up wheel-to-wheel. Two Mini Coopers parked bumper-to-bumper. One Ford 350 XL Super Duty double-cab pickup truck - with the tailgate down. Each represents the distance Brittney Reese can leap.

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Watch video package on Brittney Reese.

On her final jump at the 2008 Olympic Trials earlier this month in Eugene, Ore., Reese soared 22 feet, 9.75 inches, qualifying the University of Mississippi track and field athlete for a spot on the U.S. Olympic team in the long jump competition. Along with UM track Coach Joe Walker, Reese leaves Aug. 2 for Beijing. Her mother and an aunt plan to join her in China a few days before the Aug. 19 long jump qualifying round.

"I'll be happy with a medal," Reese said Thursday at a news conference on the UM campus. "It doesn't have to be gold."

To accomplish her dream, the 5-foot-7-inch Reese said she'll utilize the confidence gained from winning the Olympic trials. She also plans to keep her legs fresh by competing in Nice, France, and Stockholm, Sweden, in the coming weeks.

"I have to work on my speed and my last two strides," the 21-year-old Gulfport native said. "I have to be quick off the board."

With the exception of 2004, Walker has had one of his athletes compete in every Summer Olympic Games since 1976. Describing Reese as a humble, yet fierce, competitor, Walker said her ability has rejuvenated him as a coach.

"I'm extremely proud of her," Walker said. "Brittney is an outstanding role model, and she will make a great ambassador for both Ole Miss and Mississippi."

{xtypo_quote_left}"I'll be happy with a medal," Reese said Thursday at a news conference on the UM campus. "It doesn't have to be gold." {/xtypo_quote_left} Reese, who recently completed her junior year at UM, transferred from Gulf Coast Community College, which had no track team. Since arriving at Ole Miss, her star has risen rapidly as she became a four-time SEC long jump champion and two-time NCAA long jump champion. She has been ranked as the top American long jumper all year.

"It's phenomenal for her to accomplish so much in just the last two years," Walker said. "She really is special. God has blessed her."

Reese's first long jump resulted from a bet by a high school coach.

"I competed in the 400 relays, and our coach made a bet with us to see who could jump the longest," Reese explained. "I won. I won a Coke."

Reese is the sixth track athlete in Ole Miss history to qualify for the Olympic Games. She joins former UM greats Savante Stringfellow (2000), Tony Dees (1992) and Gary Kinder (1988) as the only four track athletes in school history to compete for the U.S. in the Olympic Games. Former Rebels Alvin Haynes (1992) and Allan Ince (1988) both competed in the Olympic Games for Barbados.

The long jump has been part of modern Olympic competition since the inception of the games in 1896. The 2008 games in China mark the 80th anniversary of women being allowed to compete in the long jump at the Olympic level.

For more on track and field programs at UM, got to <http://www.olemisssports.com/> .