

Please read this story and flip over to discover your opportunity to FINISH STRONG.

Excerpt taken from *Amazing Stories of Courage and Inspiration FINISH STRONG More than a statement it's an attitude* by Dan Green

It Ain't Over Till It's Over

Going into the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, expectations were very high for Paul Hamm. He was the reigning world champion – the first U.S. man to ever win a world all-around title. No American had ever won the men's all-around gold medal in gymnastics and Paul was expected to change that. The only U.S. gymnast to ever medal was Peter Vidmar in the 1984 Olympics. Paul Hamm seemed destined to at least join Vidmar by winning some sort of medal and the expectations were high that he may even win the all-around title. Hamm started strong in the first three events and held first place lead in the all-around by .038 points. Then, disaster struck. During his vault performance, he under-rotated and missed his landing, causing him to sit down and nearly fall off the platform.

His score reflected the "cardinal sin" of gymnastics and after the vault competition was over Hamm found himself in twelfth place. I remember watching the telecast and seeing him sitting on the sidelines with a pale look on his face. It was pretty clear by his reaction at that point in time he believed he had blown his chance of making history.

But, this is where Paul Hamm demonstrated the difference between mediocrity and greatness. He decided at that point in time to put his fall behind him and move forward, giving his best effort to finish strong. His next event was coming up and he was first up. He pulled off a great routine on the parallel bars and nailed his dismount. During the next rotation, a few of the competitors in the 6-11 places struggled. His great performance on the parallel bars coupled with the struggles of his competitors helped to move Hamm into fourth place in the all-around with his last strongest event left to play out – the high bar.

Paul was determined to take advantage of his positive turn of events and make sure that he at least won the bronze medal. He was a master of the high bar and he scripted a highly technical routine in order to have a shot at earning the most points possible. The die was cast as the other competitors had finished their routines. Paul was the last to go. As I sat and watched the broadcast I could see Paul pour his heart into his routine – you could feel his energy, focus and determination. When he nailed his dismount it was electrifying and even before his score was revealed, you could see on Paul's face that in his own mind he had won; regardless of his outcome. He came back from a crushing failure on the vault and proved to himself that he could execute beyond failure. And as it turns out, in one of the most dramatic comeback in all of sports he won the gold medal in the men's all-around by 1.012 points, becoming the first U.S. man to ever win the Olympic title. Talk about finishing strong.