

Sisters grad runs at U.S. Nationals

By Charlie Kanzig
Correspondent

In 2009, 13-year-old Brandon Pollard ran the 800 meters at the Hershey's Track and Field National meet in Pennsylvania. Fast forward just six years and this runner, still a teenager, is running in the USA Junior Track and Field Championships in an effort to qualify for the Pan-American Games.

He finished fifth in the 1,500 meters in sweltering heat, earning a spot as an alternate for the American team set to compete in Calgary, Alberta, late this summer.

After a stellar freshman season at Gonzaga University in Spokane under the tutelage of Pat Tyson, a former teammate of Steve Prefontaine at the University of Oregon, Pollard felt he had more races in him. Tyson had suggested the idea earlier in season and Pollard felt "it was just something I needed to do."

The fact that is was on the Hayward Field track where a year earlier Pollard won the 4A state title for 800 meters certainly sweetened the deal.

"I was really hoping for a solid experience at Hayward,

which has never failed me in the past," he said, "but I never expected a top-five finish when I signed up for the race."

The field included other college freshman as well as some high school stars such as Grant Fisher who is one of two high school milers this year who dipped below 4 minutes in the mile, but Pollard was not daunted.

"To be on the starting line with those guys wasn't as thrilling as I thought it would be," he said. "Yeah, it was cool, but I knew I was one of them."

Indeed, Pollard did belong, considering the times he ran for the Bulldogs in 2015. He set a school record in the 800 meters (1:49) and a personal best of 3:48 for 1,500 meters.

"I felt great in the post-season and knew that I had the speed to out-kick most of the guys in the race if the pace went out slow," he said.

The 1,500 final took place just after 5 p.m. on Saturday when the air temperature was a stifling 97 degrees, which contributed to the pedestrian pace for the first two laps. With 600 meters to go everyone accelerated and the race was on in a tightly bunched

pack. Pollard kept contact and closed out the final 200 meters strongly on his way to fifth place. Unofficially he was clocked around 1:55 for the final 800 meters, which is faster than he ran to win the 800-meter title last year when he was in high school.

Blake Haney, a freshman at Oregon, prevailed in 3:58.16, followed by Andrew Hunter (3:58.48), Fisher (3:58.77), Logan Wetzel (3:59.36) and Pollard, who crossed the line in 3:59.47.

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"As for now, I am the first alternate for the Pan-American Games in Canada on July 31, so if anyone drops out I will have the opportunity to wear the USA jersey," said Pollard.

His experience at Hayward was made extra special as



PHOTO BY HARRY POLLARD

Brandon Pollard kicks into the final lap of his 1,500-meter race.

three of his former coaches, including Kris Kristovich and Dennis Dempsey, traveled over the mountains to watch him compete.

"Having some of my former coaches there made it sort of a reunion race for me," he said. "It means a ton that the people that developed me and pushed me early on are still involved with my progress."

In a *Nugget* article written after his Hershey's experience in 2009, Pollard said his dream would be to run for the University of Oregon, and though he landed at another Division 1 school, he feels it is a perfect fit for him.

"Gonzaga's program is developing rapidly under Pat Tyson and I am excited to

be a part of where things are headed," he said. "I am confident that Pat can bring [me] to where [I] become the runner I have always dreamt of being."

Kristovich, who had a hand in mentoring and coaching Pollard through his middle school years and beyond is excited to see the young man developing into an elite runner.

"Having worked with Brandon all the way from the Hershey meet days to this national meet has been more than rewarding," he said. "Brandon is a coach's dream."

Pollard is the son of Don and Shannon Pollard of Sisters.



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