

Running commentary

By Charlie Kanzig
Correspondent

Olympic track and field trials are in our backyard starting Friday

I sat down with Tate Metcalf, owner of Sisters Athletic Club and former coach of Ashton Eaton — reigning Olympic champion and world record-holder in the decathlon — to get his take on Eaton’s approach to defending his title at the Olympic trials, which run July 1-10 at Hayward Field in Eugene.

“First, he has to qualify,” said Metcalf, laughing. “A lot can go wrong over the two days and 10 events of the decathlon, and even the world champion can have an event or two go wrong, but Ashton is certainly the favorite.”

Nothing went wrong four years ago when Eaton, at age 24, not only shattered the American record, but eclipsed the world record with 9039 points at Hayward Field, the same track on which he competed as a high school and college athlete. Four years later, this is likely Eaton’s swan song as a decathlete.

“I’ve talked to him quite a bit in the last two weeks, and he always wants to put on a show, but he needs to just get through the trials and focus on peaking in Rio. He better make that team now that I am committed to going!”

Eaton’s life has changed dramatically in the last four years. He is the two-time world outdoor champion and the two-time indoor champion, which means he has sponsorship obligations. He married his college sweetheart, Brianne Theisen, who

is a world-class heptathlete for Canada. The couple lives in Washington and has their training base in Eugene with long-time coach Harry Marra, who directs both of them.

As his former coach, Metcalf now sees his role simply as Eaton’s friend and encourager.

“I wasn’t planning to make the trip, but my wife and I were watching TV and a commercial came on promoting the summer Olympics and there was Ashton in the starting blocks. Seeing him like that brought tears to our eyes, and I told Aimee right then ‘I need to go to Rio.’”

Metcalf will be on hand in Brazil, thanks to Eaton’s generosity of promising tickets for him.

“I am glad I get to go. Ashton, Brianne, and even Coach Marra, told me that it makes such a difference to be able to hear familiar voices and see familiar faces in the crowd, when you are in such a big venue and so far from home. I know years from now I will never regret the expense of traveling and staying in Rio.”

Metcalf thinks even those who don’t count themselves as track fans should go for a day of the trials.

He said, “Think of it this way. The most popular events for Americans to watch at the summer games are swimming, gymnastics, and track and field. People did not swarm to Omaha and won’t flock to San José for the swimming and gymnastics. But thousands of people will pack the stands in Eugene because they want to see some of the finest athletes in the world compete. These

will be the same men and women who will be in Rio, viewed by millions worldwide and we can see them up close and personal with nothing more than a two-hour drive and a \$50 ticket. The magic of Hayward Field is real. As far as track and field goes, there is nothing like it in the world.”

He sees coming to Hayward Field as a way to make the Olympics on television that much more interesting.

“You’ve got a connection with them because it’s so up-close and personal.”

He’s right. So here’s to encouraging anyone with a free day or two between July 1-10 to get online, buy a ticket, drive to Eugene, park at Autzen Stadium and walk or shuttle to Hayward Field. Tickets start at about \$40, which I consider a bargain considering the elite level of competition you get to witness.

If you can’t find a ticket or have a large group, consider taking in the free Fan Festival that is staged just behind Hayward Field. Food, games,

live-screen action and merchandise are available. It’s a perfect place to meet up with friends and still experience the electricity of the meet going on next door.

Eaton will compete Saturday, July 2 and Sunday, July 3.

“If people can only go for one day, I might recommend going on day two of the decathlon to see if Ashton defends his title,” Tate said.

Eaton is the only Central Oregon connection to the trials, but there are plenty of runners who train in Eugene and Portland who will be among the headliners, including 10,000-meter silver medalist Galen Rupp, 1,500-meter runner Matthew Centowitz, and 800-meter runner Raevyn Rogers, steeple-chaser Evan Jager, and 5,000-meter runner Shalane Flanagan.

Being at the trials will be the highlight of summer for me, and I hope to see some folks from Sisters in Eugene.

Schedule and ticket information can be found at www.getracktownusa.com.

Sisters Eagle Airport hosts Fourth of July event

Sisters Eagle Airport will host its annual Fourth of July festivities on Monday, July 4, with a fly-in, hot rod show, pancake breakfast, skydiving and other activities.

Visitors will be able to stroll among rows of aircraft and custom cars on the tarmac.

A 5K run/walk will benefit the Sisters High School swim team. Visit www.sistersairport.com for a link to register.

The Great Rubber Chicken Drop features participants buying squares on the runway and planes dropping rubber chickens on (or off) target. Prizes to winners who end up with a chicken in their square.

The fly-in event runs from 7 a.m. to noon at the airport, located at the intersection of Camp Polk Road and Barclay Drive in Sisters.



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