

# Pollard winds up Gonzaga running career

By **Charlie Kanzig**  
Correspondent

Five years ago this month, Brandon Pollard, then a senior at Sisters High School, stood atop the podium at Hayward Field, crowned the state champion in the 800 meters. Two hours earlier, he had engaged in an epic battle in the 1,500 meters, where he finished a very close second in 3:58.83, that left him so spent he was not certain at all about even making it to the starting line for the 800.

He regrouped and won the title, going away in 1:57.69

Such is the courage, tenacity, and talent of Sisters High School's most-decorated track and field graduate.

On Saturday, May 25, Pollard's collegiate career at NCAA Division 1 Gonzaga came to a close in the quarterfinals of the mens 1,500 of the Western Regional Meet held in Sacramento, where he ran 3:45 against a stacked field and did not advance to the NCAA Championship Finals which start June 5 in Austin, Texas.

After running 3:45.22 to advance from the preliminary round on Thursday, May 23, Pollard was unable to crack the top 12, finishing 19th in a time of 3:48.03. All 12 qualifiers ran under 3:43, evidence of a very deep field of runners.

Pollard's lifetime best, 3:44.32 came earlier this month in a race at Willamette University that was a last-ditch effort to qualify for the Western Regional.

Once at Gonzaga Pollard continued to improve as a runner under Coach Pat Tyson, a former University of Oregon teammate of legend Steve Prefontaine and one of the most successful coaches in Washington prep history after a long career at Mead High School. Before long, Pollard showed he was able to compete with the best of the best. But his career was also side-tracked more than once due to injuries.

Looking back at his time

in Spokane, Pollard feels a mix of disappointment and tremendous satisfaction.

"It has been tough to look past the disappointment after my last collegiate race, as I really wanted that Nationals ticket, but I can't let that feeling linger because I look at where I am at and can confidently say that I was able to do things at Gonzaga that I never thought I would have been able to before," he said. "There were times in my career when I was on the sidelines for months on end due to injuries or other setbacks, and to have gotten to this point where I am back running with the best-of-the-best in the country after what seemed like the end of the road at times."

Being part of the Gonzaga program holds tremendous importance to Pollard. "I am just extremely proud and grateful to have been a Zag. I have been able to travel to places and seize opportunities I didn't think I would get to just through doing what I love. I have been able to achieve a lifelong dream in representing our country and bringing Gonzaga's name to new heights. I am immensely grateful to just have been a part of such a special program, team, and school. There is no other name I would rather wear on my chest."

Pollard says that an experience this season stands out in particular. It was at the Penn Relays, where Pollard ran the anchor leg of the 4 x Mile. His team ranked 12th going into the race, but before it was over the foursome had moved all the way up to fifth place.

"Not only was it an amazing racing experience and so unforgettable to have anchored for my team, but it really put things into perspective for me," he said. "It reminded me that running for Gonzaga means something greater than myself. It is humbling to lay it all out there for my teammates and program I care so much about

and to know they would do the same for me on the biggest stage."

The drive to succeed led to Pollard's greatest hardships as well. "I am disappointed in myself for not being more patient when I was injured. The majority of my sophomore and junior years were plagued by injuries, and I have a tendency to feel unsettled with where I'm at and would push the brink a bit too much and remain injured."

He continued, "At those times it was very difficult to see myself bouncing back and reaching my goals in the future. But here I am walking away from the NCAA quarterfinals in the 1,500, a place I really thought I may have lost reach of during some points in my career."

Pollard, who entered college at age 17, plans to continue racing.

"I'll definitely continue running and competing," he said. "Tyson recently told me that it's really just the beginning of my running career if I wanted to continue to pursue it. He believes in me to continue to get better and compete at the highest level, and I do as well. I am only 22 and still have a few years at least until I should hit my prime."

Pollard's future also holds a specific goal: To run under 4:00 for the mile. His best 1,500 time converts to running at 4:02.5 pace for the mile, so this goal is definitely within the realm of possibility.

Ever-grateful for his many supporters, Pollard has a long list of people who he says helped make his collegiate career possible, particularly his parents, Don and Shannon.

"From the bottom of my heart I truly feel like the luckiest son to have them in my life," he said.

Pollard extended thanks to many others as well, including his siblings Ryan, Jordan, and Maddie and his grandfather Harry. Also, in addition to his high school coaches Josh Nordell, Rima Givot,

Dennis Dempsey and the late Wayne Powell, Pollard is deeply indebted to Kris Kristovich who volunteered and conducted off-season workouts for years.

"Kris has invested years into my life and is really the reason I was ever good enough to make it to Gonzaga in the first place," he said. "Nik Goertzen has been a tremendous help as well."

After Pollard's final race for Gonzaga, Pat Tyson said, "Brandon will go down as one of the finest runners in Gonzaga history.

He has gone farther than any Zag 1,500-meter runner ever and he will be sorely missed."

Pollard has a year remaining on his master's

degree in Sport and Athletic Administration and hopes to pursue a career in coaching track and cross-country at the university level.



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Outlaws standout Brandon Pollard has concluded his running career at Gonzaga.

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