

Running commentary

By **Charlie Kanzig**
Correspondent

I don't watch much on television when it comes to sports — or anything else for that matter, — but the Summer Olympics usually keeps me riveted to the screen. Especially when it comes to the track and field and the marathon. The Tokyo Olympics were originally scheduled to start last week, but the pandemic has postponed the Games until 2021. Given the way the pandemic is going, and the toll it has taken on the health, economies, and stamina of the world, I wonder if they will happen at all before 2024. A recent poll showed that only about half of the Japanese population thinks it's a good idea to hold the Olympics next year.

But the pandemic has not thwarted the training and aspirations of some elite runners training here in Oregon, many with the Beaverton-based Bowerman Track Club (BTC), who missed the chance to compete in the 2020 Olympic Trials, but will hopefully get the chance next year.

The BTC conducted three intra-squad meets at Jesuit High School earlier this month and the results were as fast (or faster) than some Olympic Trials races from 2016.

The meets — which were

unpublicized and included no spectators and held to strict health guidelines — produced a Canadian record, an American record and some of the fastest times ever run on American soil. I find this to be remarkable given all of the circumstances the athletes, and the entire world, have been dealing with for the past many weeks.

Maybe everyone was ready to do something amazing after months of shutdowns, interruptions, and disappointments.

Shelby Houlihan, a 2016 Olympian, broke her own American record for 5000 meters on July 10 by more than 10 seconds, lowering the mark to 14:23.92. Her BTC training partner and fellow Iowan, Karissa Schweitzer, also ran under the previous record, finishing in 14:26.34. The pair now rank 12th and 14th all-time in the world. The world record is held by Tirunesh Dibaba, who ran 14:11.15 in 2008.

In the men's 5000, Canadian Moh Ahmed, ran a stunning 12:47.2 to lower his own national record by almost 11 seconds. Lopez Lomong placed second in 12:58.78, which was the ninth fastest time ever run by an American. The world record for the event was established in 2004 by Ethiopian Kenenisa Bekele

in 12:37.35.

July 21, at the third intra-squad meet, Ahmed took a turn at the 1500 meters, along with eight of his BTC teammates in what they termed to be a "time trial." Ahmed won the race in 3:34.89 seconds. For perspective, this clocking matches the winning time for the 1500 at the 2016 Olympic Trials in which the top three runners were vying for a shot at qualifying for the Games.

The women's 1500 turned out to be even more impressive as Schweitzer ran 4:00.02 to win over Colleen Quigley (4:03.98) and five other BTC racers. In 2016 Jenny Simpson won the Olympic Trials 1500 in 4:04.74.

I'd say that the Bowerman Track Club and its lead coach Jerry Schumacher, are making the most of a difficult situation and appear to be the pre-eminent training group for distance runners in America — particularly after the dismantling of the Nike Oregon Project which folded after coach Alberto Salazar was suspended from coaching by the U.S. Center for SafeSport for misconduct related to alleged doping violations.

If the BTC athletes are able to keep their spirits and training up, it seems likely some club members will be

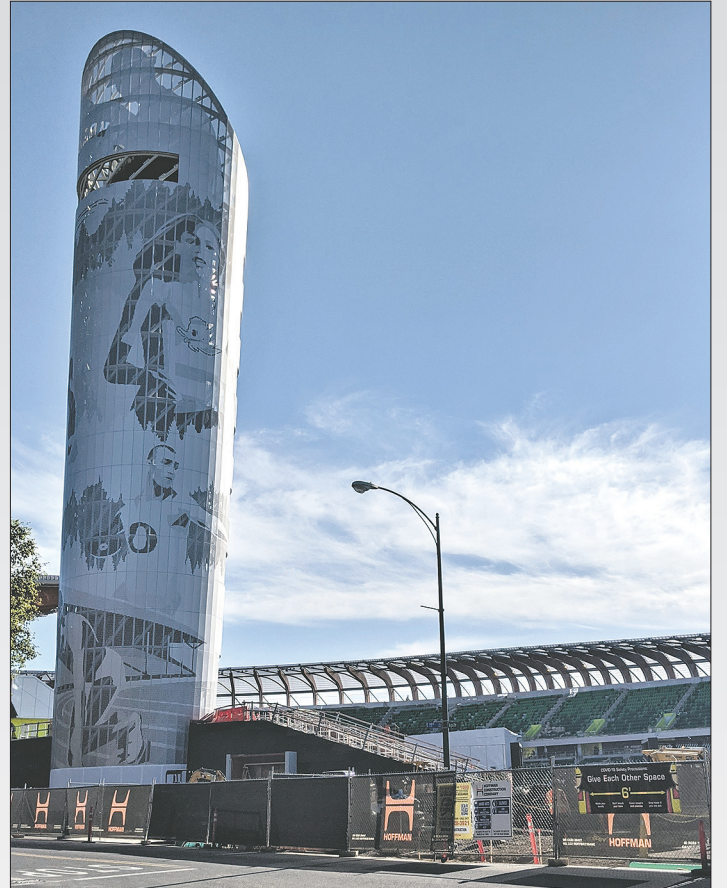


PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

The brand new Hayward Field, complete with a tower representing Oregon track and field legends, sits idle until competitions resume.

at the next Olympics.

On a related track-and-field note, the new state-of-the-art Hayward Field facility is complete and ready to be used as soon as competition is allowed to start once again. Hayward Field will be the site of the Olympic Trials, if they are held, in 2021. Eugene will also host the 2022 World Track and Field Championships, originally scheduled for 2021. The event will mark the first time that the World Championships have been held in America.

I find these runners inspirational. I see their approach as a reminder for us all to keep working to the good even if we don't know what the future holds.




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