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Eugene stars shine bright at Trials

■ Oregon athletes make the mark for the Olympics, proving that Tracktown, USA does indeed rule the field

By Jeff Smith
 Oregon Daily Emerald

The city of Eugene is certainly well represented at the U.S. Olympic Trials in Sacramento, Calif., with past, present and future Eugeneans taking part in the prominent meet.

But perhaps no Eugene athlete has captured the hearts of America quite like distance runner Marla Runyan.

On Sunday the Eugene resident finished third in the women's 1,500 meter race at Cal-State Sacramento's Hornet Stadium.

Her run of 4 minutes and 6.44 seconds was good enough to qualify her for the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

So Runyan, how's it feel to be an Olympian?

"It felt like a miracle," Runyan told a herd of reporters after qualifying for her first Olympic team.

It might seem hard to believe that a female distance runner would garner such attention and have articles written about her in magazines such as Sports Illustrated and Newsweek.

But the story is not just simply about the runner from Eugene. It's of the runner from Eugene who is legally blind.

You see, Runyan was born with macular degeneration, which means the only vision she has is peripheral.

She attended San Diego State

University and graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Education of the Deaf and a master's degree from the Education of Deaf-Blind Children.

She competed in the Paralympics in 1992 and 1996.

And here she is, on her way to the Olympic Games, becoming the first legally blind athlete to ever make a U.S. Olympic team.

To top it off, she even has her own web site (www.marlarunyan.com) that includes many personal anecdotes.

"Today my visual acuity is 20/300 in the left eye and 20/400 in the right," writes Runyan on her web site. "This is WITH contact lenses. I am very used to my eyes and how the world appears to me. It is not a factor or an excuse for a bad race."

"Sure, there are things I may never be able to do because of my vision impairment. But hopefully making the Olympic Team isn't one of them!"

It appears it wasn't.

People may still not believe that a legally blind woman could be Olympic-bound. But as the old phrase goes, "seeing is believing."

Past and present Ducks compete

Kelly Blair-Labounty is going to the show, again.

The former Duck was there for the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996, where she finished eighth in the women's heptathlon.

And on Saturday she made sure she would go to her second Olympic Games when she placed third in the heptathlon.

She became the first Duck to qualify for the 2000 U.S. Olympic Team with possibly more to come later on.

Blair-Labounty had finished the first round of competition at fifth

place after scoring marks of 13.72 seconds in the 100 meter hurdles, 5 feet, 7 inches in the high jump, 44 feet in the shot put and 24.61 in the 200 meter dash.

She knew she needed to have a strong second day to qualify. And she did, with marks of 21 feet in the long jump, 151-7 in the javelin and 2:14.24 in the 800 meters.

Making the Olympic team was especially sweet for her after overcoming back injuries and Achilles and calf muscle strains in May.

A current Duck who wrapped up competition on Sunday was junior Karis Howell, and while she may not be headed to Sydney, she still has a lot to be proud of.

Howell capped off her All-American season by competing in the women's javelin competition.

She finished 13th in her opening qualifying round with a heave of 144-7. The throw wasn't enough to move her onto the finals, and she ended up finishing 25th overall out of 28 participants.

Tracktown, USA scores another

Eugene will certainly be the place to be for track and field in the year 2001.

On Friday, it was formally announced that the USA Outdoor Track and Field Championships will be held at legendary Hayward Field.

The meet will return here after its successful showing in the summer of 1999.

The USA Championships will be held June 21-24 and will follow two other big-time competitions. The annual Prefontaine Classic is tentatively marked for May 27, and then the 2001 NCAA Track and Field Championships will take place from May 30-June 2.

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