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Local athletes play 'down under'

Several athletes from around the state represent the United States at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

A couple of athletes competing at the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia once donned the Oregon colors of green and gold.

Two former Ducks — Karl Keska and Nick Rogers — journeyed to Sydney this summer to pit their skills against the world's top competitors. Other athletes from Eugene and around the state also took part in the planet's most celebrated sporting event.

Keska was the first Duck to compete at the 2000 Olympic Games, recording a personal-best time of 27 minutes, 44.09 seconds in the 10,000-meter semifinals on Wednesday.

The England representative, born in Wolverhampton, England, finished eighth in the 25-lap event as the top European in the field. Keska qualified for the 18-man final after placing sixth in the second of two preliminary heats three days prior with a then-personal-best time of 27:48.29.

Keska was joined at the finish line by two familiar faces from his days as a Duck. Former Arizona athlete Abdi Abdirahman and UCLA athlete Mebrahtom Keferzighi finished 10th and 12th place, respectively.

The British Olympic Federation selected Keska to its Olympic team back in April after a then-personal-best effort of 28:00.56 in an IAAF meet in Lisbon, Portugal, on April 1.

Overall in the 10,000, returning Olympic champion Haile Gebrselassie of Ethiopia defended his title (27:18.20) and edged 1996 Olympic silver medalist Paul Ter-

gat (27:18.29) in a down-to-the-wire final lap. Fellow Ethiopian Assefa Mezebu took the bronze medal.

Rogers, who posted an impressive 5,000-meter personal best of 13:18.50 on Aug. 5 at the Heusden meet in Brussels, Belgium, did not advance past Wednesday's opening heat in his first Olympiad. The Snoqualmie, Wash., native dipped well below his lifetime best, managing just 13:46.18 in the 5,000's preliminary race.

Rogers finished third at the U.S.

Portland Trailblazer Steve Smith is playing for the U.S. basketball team and is virtually a sure-fire bet to bring home a gold medal.

Olympic Trials in July, then added the Olympic "A" qualifying standard with his performance at the Heusden meet.

A third Oregon alum, Kelly Blair LaBounty, qualified for the women's heptathlon after a third-place finish in the U.S. Olympic Trials in July, but did not compete in Sydney due to injury.

Eugene hammer thrower Lance Deal, a silver medalist at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, failed to qualify for his event's finals. Before the games, Deal said that this would be his final season.

Also from Eugene, Maria Mutola won Mozambique's first gold medal in the 800 meters, and local kayaker John Mooney qualified for today's final in the K4 1000 race. Marla Runyan qualified for the 1,500-meter finals with a time of 4:06.14 on Thursday — her medal race takes place at 5:20 a.m. Saturday.

American 'prowess' reigns in Sydney



TWO MINUTES FOR CROSSCHECKING
PETER HOCKADAY

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Damn, it feels good to be an American. Not only do we dominate world politics, world economics and world culture, but then we go to Sydney and kick the world's behind over there, too?

Oh say, can you see.

I mean, there are come-from-behind victories, human-interest stories for everybody (just ask Bob Costas) and, of course, there's Gary Payton. What's not to love about this U.S. Olympic team?

Who cares if C.J. tested positive? Marion's still going to win those five golds! Aborigines, smigenees — watch Michael Johnson! Ah, let the so-called "Thorpedo" take his two events; we'll just mop the floor with the Australians in everything else!

All of this winning is very emotional, of course. I practically burst into tears every time I turn on the television these days. There's Laura Wilkenson bawling

over beating the Chinese off the diving board. There's the gymnastics team — it's just one big tissue-fest with those 14-year-olds. There's Tommy Lasorda: I just broke down when he finally won something again.

But at least some of the teams put a smile on my mug. Really, how can you not love the American tennis teams? I mean, Venus

I practically burst into tears every time I turn on the television these days.

Williams is just a perfect representation of all Americans: humble, quiet and reserved. Good thing Jeff Tarrago, tantrum boy, was our last U.S. men's player. I wouldn't have wanted Pete Sampras representing this fine country!

And shame on those Australians for booing our basketball team! Those boys are the model of civility and sportsmanship. My favorite part of the opening ceremonies was when the NBC camera panned to tight-lipped Minnesota Timberwolves forward Kevin Garnett, Panama hat tilted to one side, carrying a video camera and just soaking it all in. He must be surprised Dream Team XXXVIII is doing so

Tom Pappas of Azalea finished fifth overall in his first Olympic decathlon, making the trip after winning the U.S. Olympic Trials in July. Not far from Pappas' hometown, swimmer Chris Thompson of Roseburg will take home a bronze medal in the 1,500-meter freestyle.

Mike Kinkade of Tigard was on the U.S. baseball team that stunned Cuba, 4-0 on Wednesday, for the gold medal.

Shannon MacMillan, Conor Casey, Tiffeny Milbrett and Michelle French, all of the University of Portland, will compete for gold in the women's soccer finals against Norway.

Elsewhere around the state, Portland Trailblazer Steve Smith is playing for the U.S. basketball team and is virtually a sure-fire bet to bring home a gold medal. Natalie Williams and DeLisha Milton, both from the now-defunct Portland Power, are leading the women's basketball tournament in the race for the gold.

Courtenay Becker Day of The Dalles finished 21st in the sailing competition. Ken Brauckmiller of Portland played for the Netherlands' baseball team but did not advance. Dave Daniels of Redmond is playing basketball for Canada. Rower Hilary Gehman of Portland finished second in repechage and fifth in the quadruple sculls.

Netherlands swimmer Inge de Bruijn and 1,500-meter runner Suzy Favor Hamilton trained in the state. Bruijn won golds in the 100 butterfly, 100 freestyle and 50 freestyle, plus a silver in the 400 freestyle relay. Hamilton advanced to her event's semifinals.

Gladstone wrestler Matt Lindland won a silver medal, rower Amy Martin of Kent finished sixth and Wyndham St. John of Prineville, competing for Canada's equestrian team, finished 23rd in his race.

well! How many other countries can claim that they have actual NBA players on their teams?

But gosh, we weren't even supposed to win half of these golds, which frankly are starting to weigh us down. We weren't supposed to beat Cuba in baseball. We had a greco-roman wrestler (my favorite Olympic sport, by the way) who knocked off a guy that won golds in the past three Summer Games! Stop it, please!

And where does this Lance Armstrong guy come from? I thought he was supposed to be good. "Superman," as he's often called, sarcastically noted before coming to Sydney, "I can win five Tours (meaning the Tour de France), but if I lose at the Olympics, everyone back home says, 'Who is that guy?'"

Excuse me, Lance, but isn't that the way it should be? Shouldn't the Olympics be the pinnacle? The top of the heap? Do they happen once a year, or every four years? I'm not quite clear on that fact. And which is better, a bright-yellow shirt or a heavy gold medal? Definitely the shirt.

But seriously, I've just been kidding with you this whole time. I only really watch the Olympics for Katie Couric.

Peter Hockaday is a sports reporter for the Emerald. He can be reached at phockaday@yahoo.com

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