

Olympic Trials leave Eugene - headed to California



PHOTO BY ZACH SILVA/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Oregon women nab the historic Triple Crown earlier this year at Hayward Field which has hosted the Olympic trials in 2008, 2012 and 2016. However, 2020 will see the trials in California, not Eugene.

By Zach Silva

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The 2020 U.S. Track and Field Olympic Trials will be held in the Los Angeles area and not in Eugene. The USATF board of directors announced on Wednesday that Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) in Walnut, California will be the host for this prestigious event.

"The board, and especially our active athletes, were clear in their desire to take the Olympic Trials back to Los Angeles," said board chair Steve Miller in a statement. "Mt. SAC has long been one of the top meets in the country, from an athlete performance perspective as well as from an organizational perspective. With the stadium upgrades currently planned, we are confident Mt. SAC will provide an extraordinary experience for athletes, fans, officials and volunteers."

Eugene played host to the Track and Field Trials in 2008, 2012

and 2016 and will be hosting the World Track and Field Championships in 2021. Renovations to the Hayward Field facilities are scheduled to begin this summer.

"We congratulate Mt. San Antonio College and the city of Los Angeles on winning the right to host the 2020 U.S. Olympic Team Trials," said TrackTown USA CEO Michael Reilly in a statement. "Their passion for track and field will create an amazing environment for the athletes." He went on to say, "We are grateful for the thousands of volunteers, public and private sector leaders, and businesses throughout Oregon that helped us to build the Olympic Team Trials into an amazing festival for track and field in 2008, 2012 and 2016. Our community put forth a bold vision for 2020, and we look forward to future opportunities to partner with USA Track & Field in showcasing the sport we love."

In just four years, the eyes of the world will be focused on a world-class Hayward Field on the beautiful University of Oregon campus as this country hosts the IAAF World Championships Oregon21. TrackTown USA is excited to continue working with USA Track & Field, the state of Oregon and all of our partners on creating a global platform for the sport in 2021 that will leave a lasting legacy for decades to come."

No immediate reason behind the decision was made available as of press time.

Elsewhere in Track Town, USA this week, the BBC has reported that the the FBI and IRS are investigating to see if any wrongdoing occurred that led to Eugene winning the rights to host the 2021 IAAF World Championships.

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"To be truthful, I wasn't sure how this season was going to go," said Rice.

A part of this was due to the fact that two-time all-state pitcher and senior Kalli Frieze injured her elbow at the end of last season and would instead be playing shortstop this year.

This vacant pitching role caused some worry but the role was soon filled by freshman Nicki Derrick.

"For a freshman, she can throw the ball," said Rice. "She was mature and handled the pressure like a seasoned veteran."

The team started the season in great form winning the first nine games. The Warriors were scoring runs at will and in that stretch of nine games scored over ten runs seven times. But even in that

instance, Rice was preaching the importance of team defense.

"We started telling the girls at the beginning of the season that we were going to have a good season but that defense wins ball games," said Rice. "If we don't have a good defense, we're not going to go very far. And that was our theme - defense will win these ball games."

A key part of this defensive success rested with the senior leader behind the plate Nikki Toy.

"I believe the she is the best catcher in the state. Nothing got past her. She basically ran the field when we were out on defense. She did it all," said Rice.

The team dropped some games in the middle of the schedule but this 1A team that had 14 girls out

of a school that only has 94 students, went on to win the combined 1A/2A league title. They were the given the fifth seed in playoffs and went on to upset the number one seed Kennedy in the semifinals behind two especially difficult catches from freshman center fielder Sofia Alcantar that coach Rice says "won the game" for them.

The girls were then faced with the number two seeded team consisting of girls from Pilot Rock and Nixyaawii. This combining of two schools is common throughout 1A softball with smaller schools. The team of the combined schools had a record of 25-5 going into the championship and at one point had a ten game winning streak. They met in the championship at Oregon State's Softball Complex in Corvallis.

"You walked in and you could see it on the girls face, they were in awe," said Rice. "I told them, I want you to take a moment and think about where you are because you are going to remember this for the rest of your life."

The team capitalized on this rare opportunity and behind Derrick's 10 strikeouts they became state champions. The girls, the school and the city of Drain were all ecstatic.

"We had a police escort back into town and when we got back to town they had lined the street," said Rice. "There were a couple hundred people at the school parking lot when we got there. It was a great feeling."

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