

2012 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials

Pacific Association Athletes' Highlights

By Bob Burns

Not surprisingly, most of the attention at the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials in Houston focused on the frontrunners – the mostly familiar names vying for Olympic berths.

The attention was warranted as both the men's and women's races selected deserving, battle-tested Olympians. The men's race, won by Meb Keflezighi in 2 hours, 9 minutes and 8 seconds, featured the best U.S. Olympic Trials times ever for places two through 24. Former Stanford star Ryan Hall, the pre-race favorite, finished second in 2:09:30.

Shalene Flanagan won the women's race in a Trials-record 2:25:38 as the top 14 finishers registered the fastest times-for-place in the race's history.

But one of the beauties of the marathon is that there are countless races within the race. A scroll through the results reveals a number of noteworthy races from Pacific Association athletes.

Clara Horowitz Peterson of San Anselmo placed 16th in her marathon debut in 2:35:50. The former Duke All-American and mother of two young children ran a well-judged race that bodes well for her future at the distance. The same holds true for Cal graduate **Brooke Wells**, who finished 19th in a career-best 2:36:24.

"I'm anxious to run another," Horowitz Peterson said.

At the opposite end of the experience spectrum, **Linda Somers Smith** of Arroyo Grande qualified for a record seventh Olympic Trials marathon at age 50 and showed she deserved to be trading strides with the best women in the country.

Sixteen years after qualifying for the 1996 Olympic marathon team, Somers Smith finished 28th in 2:37:36, an American record for the 50-54 age class. Her time translates to an age-graded 2:13:28, well under the women's world record of 2:15:25 held by Paula Radcliffe.

"I was very happy with my performance and considered it a success," Somers Smith said. "I felt in control the entire race."

Wells, a sales development associate for AOL in San Francisco, credited an out-of-control moment for her strong showing.

"At mile 8, I fell while trying to get my bottle from the water station," Wells said. "I face planted on the cement but was able to get back in the pack of women I was running with.

"I think the fall took off a lot of pressure and allowed me to run with a free spirit and just go for it."

For **Blake Russell** of Pacific Grove, a 2008 Olympian who came to Houston confident despite not having completed a full marathon in four years, the Trials were just that. Russell dropped out shortly after the 18-mile mark, at which point she was in 15th place, about four minutes behind the leaders.

“I just did not feel good at the start,” Russell said. “Strange, but my coach said form looked bad from the beginning. I just felt really flat. It was pretty frustrating not to be in the hunt from the beginning.”

Magdalena Lewy Boulet of Oakland, another 2008 Olympian, finished 10th in 2:33:42.

Horowitz Peterson, a state high school champion in the 3,200 meters while attending Head Royce in Oakland, kept a steady pace through the first 24 miles but dropped a couple of minutes and one place in the final two miles.

“I definitely hit a wall,” she said. “But I was pleased to know that I left everything I had out on the course.”

In the men’s race, which started 15 minutes before the women on the same three-loop course on Jan. 14 in downtown Houston, a trio of Pacific Association runners finished close together in 24th, 25th and 27th place.

Daniel Tapia clocked a personal-best 2:15:28 in 14th, followed closely by **Sergio Reyes** in 2:15:41. **Keith Bechtol** was 27th in 2:16:02, also a lifetime best. Another Pacific Association runner, **Stephan Shay**, was 34th in a career-best 2:16:48.

Tapia, 25, attended UC Santa Cruz, which doesn’t have track or cross country programs. While juggling law school with his training, Tapia qualified for the Olympic Trials by clocking 2:16:50 at the 2011 Rock and Roll Marathon in San Diego.

In Houston, Tapia reached the halfway point in 1:06 and was in 15th place at the 18-mile mark. The last six miles were a struggle, but Tapia still managed to lower his personal best by a sizable margin, clocking 2:15:28.

“Leading up to the race, I completed some great long tempos at marathon pace and thought I was ready to run 2:12 or 2:13,” Tapia said. “I think I got ahead of myself in the early stages of the race. Had I gone out slower, I’m only left to think how much faster or slower I could have possibly run.

“Nevertheless, I executed my race plan for most of the race, and I learned a great deal about continuing to be patient in the marathon,” Tapia said.

Reyes, a Pacific Association member who now lives in Palmdale, Ca., finished one spot behind Tapia, clocking 2:15:41.

“I was pretty satisfied with my control of the race,” Reyes said. “I wanted to be sure that I was sticking to my guns and running the race in a way that afforded me the best chance of success. I was able to do that for the most part, which resulted in a solid time but just not quite the special day that’s needed for big things to happen.”

Bechtol was delighted to finish his first Olympic Trials race in a lifetime-best 2:16:02, which was good for 27th place. Bechtol’s preparation had been hampered by plantar fasciitis.

“My goal during the summer had been to run under 2:15 in Houston, but I’m thrilled with a new personal-best time considering that I had to adapt my training so much during the last few months,” Bechtol said. “Honestly, my goal on race morning was just to finish the race. Any time under 2:19 would be a bonus.”

Bechtol is a graduate student at Stanford, where he is wrapping up his Ph.D. in physics. At 27, he hopes to continue competing for several more years, providing a break from his work in astrophysics.

“It was a great experience and an honor to compete against such an elite field,” Bechtol said. “Maybe I’ll have another chance in four years.”

Somers Smith, who qualified for her first Olympic Trials in 1988, will be 54 when the next Trials roll around. Can she see herself qualifying for an *eighth* time?

“I can envision qualifying, but a lot depends on how many body holds up,” Somers Smith said. “I will only run or try to qualify if I am enjoying the process and my body feels up to it. I will not try to qualify for the sake of qualifying.”

Her longevity is even more impressive in light of the fact that Somers Smith is a practicing attorney. The former UC Davis runner doesn’t see it that way, however.

“It’s actually easy,” she said. “Running is a great balance for my profession. Anyone can find time for it. I could easily say I’m too tired to fit it in, but in the end it gives me more energy and I’m more productive at work when I run.

“That’s not to say I’m not frustrated that I don’t have time to sleep in, get massages, stretch and relax as much as I’d like, but not many people have the luxury of that.”

At 27, **Horowitz Peterson** figures to have more Olympic Trials in her future, on the track as well as the road. She is now concentrating on the 5,000 and 10,000 meters for this summer’s U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials in Eugene, Ore. After that, she’ll give the marathon another go.

“I think I have at least another six or seven years of racing on the track, and 10 to 12 years in the marathon,” Horowitz Peterson. “I think the marathon’s definitely going to be my race, so I’m pretty excited.”

Other Pacific Association finishers:

Women: Rachel Booth, 31st place, 2:37:59; ; Catherine Mullen, 62nd place, 2:43:02; Julia Stamps, 68th place, 2:44:07; Ashley Carroll, 72nd place, 2:44:29; Claudia Becque, 78th place, 2:45:00; Mary Coordt, 90th place, 2:46:18; Lisbet Sunshine, 91st place, 2:46:30; Midori Sperandeo, 99th place, 2:47:14; Rachel Niehuus, 106th place, 2:48:13; Megan Daly, 127th place, 2:52:09; Lindsay Nelson, 130th place, 2:52:55; Meghan Arbogast, 143rd place, 2:58:53; Shannon Cody, 144th place, 2:58:54.

Men: Malcolm Richards, 51st place, 2:20:15; Chris Chavez, 53rd place, 2:20:18; Crosby Freeman, 70th place, 2:22:28; Tim Tollefson, 79th place, 2:27:00.