

## **Ailene Voisin: Is Sac back on track for more events?**

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Sacramento's comeback began with a shot heard round the Capitol, of all places, and ended at Hornet Stadium on Sunday afternoon with a communal high-five and high praise from USA Track & Field officials.

So did the city win? Is track back? Was the effort that ended the 10-year drought impressive enough to throw Sac back in the game?

Reading between the lines – while studying the forceful body language of USATF's chief public affairs officer – the initial postscript oozes positive vibes.

“This puts Sacramento in a very strong position for 2017,” said Jill Geer of USATF. “The meet here has been very smooth. This is one of our strongest showings in what you would call an off year, when the athletes aren't competing for berths in the Olympics or the World Championships. And certainly we know if the Olympic Trials were to be here, both sides of the stadium would be filled.”

They know this because? Because the place was packed for the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Trials, and because even after the decades-long absence, the withdrawals and absences of a number of the sport's high-profile stars, attendance figures for the five-day event exceeded expectations. Co-meet director John Mansoor assured USATF the event would attract at least 22,500 spectators – a figure reached by Saturday afternoon. An additional announced crowd of 9,601 that attended Sunday's final events brought the total to 38,283.

There were other promises made and promises kept, aided by an extraordinary collaboration within the business community. Area hotels assessed fees to fund the \$1.4 million state-of-the-art track. State officials facilitated the shot put competition that attracted 5,500 fans to the west lawn at the Capitol. Kings President Chris Granger assigned several of his employees to assist with ticket sales and marketing, then arranged for Kings first-round pick Nik Stauskas to make an appearance at the stadium hours after his introductory news conference Saturday at the team's practice facility.

Even the weather gods cooperated. The evenings were cool for the distance runners and the days were hot – but not too hot – for the sprinters, jumpers and throwers. The temperature inched toward triple-digits mid-Sunday afternoon, but the Weather Channel reported a survivable 95 degrees when the men's 110-meter hurdles concluded the meet shortly after 3 p.m.

“I love the heat,” said long jump champion Brittney Reese, who is more accustomed to steamy, sweaty afternoons Mississippi. “I was down there (in the long jump pit),

enjoying myself, and everyone else was pouring water on themselves. It was beautiful to me.”

Though there was obvious disappointment when sprinter Allyson Felix opted not to run the 100-meter semifinals and LaShawn Merritt withdrew from the 400, there were an abundance of highlights, a few that could be considered highly unusual: UC Davis graduate Kim Conley overcame Jordan Hasay on the home stretch to win the 10,000 meters, her first national title; four-time defending USA outdoor 800 champion Alysia Montano ran a qualifying heat despite being 34 weeks pregnant “because competing and enjoying this sport is what I do;” Johnny Dutch captured his first USA 400 hurdles title after talking himself out of retiring because of previous failures; Reese, the world’s most dominant long jumper, won her event less than 24 hours after learning that her stepfather and great uncle had passed away.

It all started, of course, with Mansoor’s stroke of genius, with the notion of holding the Capitol Shot Put. “We call track a three-ring circus, but in reality, there’s six or seven things always going on,” said the longtime local promoter. “So the idea was, ‘Let’s pull this out. Focus on this one event. Bring the crowds. Let’s have beer, let’s have music, let’s make it a festival.’ If they let me, next time I’d do the pole vault in Old Sac.”

So about that next time. Bring it on. Besides bidding for the 2017 national championships, Sacramento Sports Commission director Mike Sophia plans to aggressively bid for several more events, both minor and major, among them the NCAA men’s basketball regional in 2016 or 2017, depending on the completion date of the downtown sports and entertainment complex.

Of further note is this: Though he won’t have the final numbers until next week, Sophia said he is confident the event generated a profit.

“It’s been 10 years since we’ve been here,” added USATF’s Geer, “and it’s been far too long. Sacramento in the 2000 and ’04 Trials raised the bar. And once again, this illustrated that there is an underlying love of sports in Sacramento.”