

Isabella (Izzy) Fauria

Three Golds at the 2014 National Junior Olympic Championships!



By Bob Burns

As the longtime coach of the BB Racing, the youth running club formerly known as the Buffalo Babes, Joe Hartman is used to receiving glowing scouting reports.

So it came as no great surprise to be attending a meet a couple of years ago and have one of his runners' mother tell him, "Joe, there's this girl you need to check out. She's really fast."

"OK, OK, thanks," Hartman responded.

Feeling rebuffed, the mother grabbed his arm and said, "No, Joe. She's *really* fast."

The girl in question was Isabella Fauria, a fifth-grader from Roseville who was tearing up her local parochial league. In this case, the scouting report was spot-on. The girl was fast. *Really* fast.

At the 2014 USATF National Junior Olympics in Humble, Texas, Fauria displayed the full range of her talents. She won the 800, 1,500 and 3,000-meter finals in the 11-12 age group over a 25-hour time span.

“She’s very humble and polite, but she’s also got an incredible heart and hunger to win,” Hartman said.

What the 4-foot-6 dynamo did in Texas bears recapping. On July 23, she won her preliminary heat in the 800 meters. She had the next two days off before returning to the track for two finals on July 26.

At 9 a.m., Isabella won the 3,000 meters in 10 minutes, 27.40 seconds. The runner-up, London Culbreath of McKinney, Texas, was more than 10 seconds behind.

Less than five hours later, Fauria had what she figured would be her toughest race, the 800-meter final. She again answered the bell, clocking a winning 2:19.06 to win by a stride or two in front of Long Beach resident Rachel Gunn.

The next day, Fauria lined up for her third final, the 1,500-meter run, and again raced to victory in 4:52.91, the equivalent to a 5:16 mile. Of the nearly 10,000 athletes competing in Texas, Fauria was the only one to claim three individual titles.

“Everyone likes to win,” Fauria said. “That feeling of winning and that pride of showing how hard you worked ... I just find it really satisfying.”

Before winning three races at the National Junior Olympics, Fauria had become something of a sensation in Northern California circles for her performances in high school and even college invitational races.

“It was cool but also kind of overwhelming,” Fauria said of competing against collegians. “All the girls were so tall, and I’m pretty small.”

At the Pacific Association Junior Olympics in late May, Fauria dominated her age group, clocking a personal best in the 800 (2:19.56) and winning the 1,500 in 4:49.71. She then entered the Golden West Invitational, one of the most prestigious high school meets in the country, at Sacramento State. The recent sixth-grade graduate doubled in the 800 and 3,200, finishing ninth in the shorter race and second in the eight-lap event.

Hartman and her father aren’t concerned that she’s risking injury or burnout, running so fast at such a young age, for one simple reason.

“She really doesn’t practice,” Matt Fauria said. “Joe doesn’t hold practices more than once or twice a week.”

Hartman said he limits Fauria and other runners her age to 12 to 15 miles a week.

“We never run more than five miles in practice,” Hartman said. “It’s usually four miles two times a week. Isabella has really good speed. The key (in the future) is helping her keep that speed.”

Her first race came just two years ago, when as a fifth-grader at St. Rose she was allowed to compete in a couple of junior-high cross country meets. She dusted the competition, male and female.

Izzy qualified for the 2012 National Junior Olympic Cross Country Championships in Albuquerque, N.M. She finished ninth in the bantam girls (9-10) age group. Her experience at the same meet in 2013 didn’t go nearly as well, though it did reveal something about her mind set. Shortly after arriving in San Antonio, she came down with food poisoning and was sick the entire time. She insisted on running, however, and finished 112th out of 405 runners in the girls 11-12 race.

“I came all that way to run, so I figured I might as well do the best I could,” Fauria said.

Matt Fauria has no background as a runner. He figures Izzy inherited her talent from his wife’s brother, who was a standout distance runner at Riverbank High School 30 years ago.

Age-group success is obviously no guarantee of a standout high school or college career. For now, the elfin prodigy from Roseville is enjoying the thrill of multiple victories. She does occasionally allow herself to think of bigger and better things down the road.

“I do dream about stuff,” she said. “I do want to go the University of Oregon and go to the Olympics.”

Following her triple victory in Texas, Matt and Sylvia Fauria forced Izzy to take a break from running. She pleaded with her parents to let her start running again, but they held firm through August.

In her first race following the mandated time-out, Fauria won the middle school girls race at the Lagoon Valley Classic Invitational in Vacaville. Things were normal again.

“Most of her friends don’t even know that won a national title,” Matt Fauria said. “She just wants to be like the other kids.”
