



Track and field

High school stars hope to break through at U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials

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Current high school “*professional*” track and field stars Vashti Cunningham, Candace Hill, and Kaylin Whitney will join at least a dozen prep “amateurs” who have qualified to compete in the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team Trials that begin today through July 10 in Eugene, Ore.

They make up one of the largest groups of high school athletes ever to qualify for the elite meet – where the top three finishers in most events will be on the American team headed to Rio in August.

Cunningham, the current U.S. and world indoor champion in the high jump, is a top candidate for an Olympic berth after just finishing her senior year at Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas). She will be in qualifying competition during Friday’s opening day at University of Oregon’s Hayward Field. Nobody in the world this year has jumped higher than Cunningham’s 6-foot, 6-1/4 inch clearance in winning the USA indoor title in March. Turning pro for the outdoor season, Cunningham has scaled 6-4 1/4 so far in limited appearances.

Last year, Hill set the high school 100-meter record of 10.98 seconds as a sophomore at Rockdale County (Conyers, Ga.) and won the World Youth (under age 18) Championships in both the 100 and 200. She was named the American Family Insurance ALL-USA Girls Track Athlete of the Year and also the Gatorade National Female Athlete of the Year.

She broke the then year-old prep record of 11.10 set by Whitney as a sophomore at East Ridge (Clermont, Fla.). They also rank Nos. 2 and 3 all-time on the high school 200 meter list (22.43 and 22.49, respectively) behind defending Olympic gold medalist Allyson Felix (22.11) – who will also be in Eugene seeking her fourth Olympic team. So the top three all-time high school 200 meter runners will be participating in Trials events.

Top boys “amateur” sprinter Norman and Lyles set for Trials

The top two boys sprinters over the past two seasons, Michael Norman and Noah Lyles, will be challenging some of the world’s fastest athletes after winning USA Junior National titles last weekend.

Norman, of Vista Murrieta (Murrieta, Calif.), has already had an outstanding week, winning the National (USATF) Junior 200 title on Sunday in Clovis, Calif., in a world junior-leading 20.15 seconds — the third-fastest high school time ever and just .02 short of the 32-year-old record.

He expressed disappointment, however, after the race. “Everything was great until I came off the turn,” Norman said. “I stumbled a little. I’ll focus now (for the Trials) in coming off the turn.”

On Tuesday, he became the first two-time Gatorade Boys National Track and Field Athlete of the year.

Last year Norman ran the 400 meters in 45.19 seconds at the California CIF State Meet (on the same Buchanan High track in Clovis) – equaling the National Federation Record (fastest ever in a high school meet).

Lyles, of Williams (Alexandria, Va.), has led the boys 100 meter rankings for the past two seasons (and was the leader at 200 meters last year, just ahead of Norman). He was the 2015 American Family Insurance ALL-USA Boys Track and Field Athlete of the Year after setting junior class records in both the 100 and 200. Lyles won the National Junior 100 title last week in a slightly wind-aided 10.08. His best legal times are 10.14 and 20.18, both in 2015 (the latter in beating Norman for last year’s USA Junior title).

McLaughlin aiming to be youngest female track Olympian

The “amateur” girls focus will be on high school 400-meter hurdles record breaker Sydney McLaughlin, who received Gatorade Girls National Track and Field Athlete of the year honors on Monday. McLaughlin, 16, “finally” broke the 32-year-old girls high school hurdles record on June 19, running 54.46 at the New Balance Nationals.

The 2015 World Youth champion from Union Catholic in New Jersey has broken class and age records during each of her high school seasons and now hopes to become the youngest U.S. female Olympian. She ranks No. 5 in the world this season with her record time.

“That would be unreal to me — it’s something I’ve talked about as a 7-year-old girl to my mom,” she told Gannett partner The Asbury Park Press. “I don’t think it has hit me yet, everything that is happening. It’s definitely just unreal, and to wear the USA across my chest would be an honor, especially as a 16-year-old.” “I definitely will be nervous,” she added. “I’ll just go out there and worry about my race and just try to bring my time down. I’m not really worrying about what anyone else is doing.”

Sister-brother combos

Cunningham and McLaughlin both have their older brothers qualified for the Trials.

Randall Cunningham II won the NCAA high jump title for Southern California at Eugene in June. Taylor McLaughlin, a University of Michigan freshman, took the USATF Junior 400 hurdles title last week in Clovis – just after his sister Sydney took the girls crown.

Bruckner the lone HS Thrower

Elena Bruckner (Valley Christian, San Jose, Calif.) is the No. 4 all-time high school Discus thrower with her 2016 pacesetting mark of 186-10.

Among the high school students qualified/accepted to compete in the 2016 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Team Trials, July 1-10, at University of Oregon, (best marks in brackets):

BOYS

Noah Lyles, Williams (Alexandria, Va.), 100 meters (10.14), 200 meters (20.18).
Michael Norman, Vista Murrieta (Murrieta, Calif.), 200 meters (20.15), 400 meters (45.19).
Norman Grimes, Jr., Canyon, Texas, 400 meter hurdles (50.10).
Vernon Turner, Yukon, Okla., high jump (7-4 1/2).
Noah Martin, University (Spokane Valley, Wash.)

GIRLS

Candace Hill, Rockdale County (Conyers, Ga.), 100 meters (10.98), 200 meters (22.43).
Kaylin Whitney, East Ridge (Clermont, Fla.), 100 meters (11.17), 200 meters (22.47).
Lynna Irby, Pike (Indianapolis), 400 meters (51.79)
Samantha Watson, Rush-Henrietta (Henrietta, N.Y.), 800 meters (2:02.91).
Kate Murphy, Lake Braddock (Burke, Va.), 1,500 meters (4:07.21).
Christina Aragon, Billings, Mont., 1,500 meters (4:09.27).
Chanel Brissett, Cheltenham, (Wyncote, Pa.), 100 meter hurdles (13.01).
Sydney McLaughlin, Union Catholic (Scotch Plains, N.J.), 400 meter hurdles (54.46).
Anna Cockrell, Providence Day (Charlotte, N.C.), 400 meter hurdles (55.89).

Vashti Cunningham, Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, Nev.), high jump (6-6 1/4).
Samiyah Samuels, Cypress Springs (Cypress, Texas), long jump (21-3 1/4).
Tara Davis, Agoura (Agoura Hills, Calif.), long jump (21-0 1/2).
Elena Bruckner, Valley Christian (San Jose, Calif.) discus throw (186-10).