

WITH EXPLOSIVE SPRINT, ANDREWS NABS FIRST USA 1500M TITLE
(*USATF Pacific note:* in the women's 1500m, Simpson runs smart for the win with Sacramento's Kate Grace a strong second.)
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PHOTO: Robby Andrews wins the 2017 USATF Outdoor Track & Field Championships 1500m over Matthew Centrowitz (2nd place, right), Craig Engels (4th place, center left) and Johnny Gregorek (3rd place, left). Photo by David Monti for Race Results Weekly.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (24-Jun) -- With mid-afternoon temperatures inside of Hornet Stadium hovering at about 100°F (38°C), Robby Andrews kept his cool in the men's 1500m final at the USATF National Outdoor Track & Field Championships here. Timing his final sprint to perfection, the 26 year-old Olympian picked up his first national outdoor title and locked in a provisional team berth for the IAAF World Championships in Athletics in London in August.

"It feels really good to (finally) win a race," a smiling Andrews told the media.

Andrews, who represents adidas, finished second at last year's Olympic Trials in the same discipline, behind eventual Olympic champion, Matthew Centrowitz of the Nike Oregon Project. But Centrowitz had been struggling recently to overcome several health problems before these championships and revealed that after a period of light cross-training he had only been running for ten days.

Nonetheless, Centrowitz was the race leader as the 13-athlete field ran through the finish line for the first time, but the pace was predictably slow. Clayton Murphy of Nike, the 2016 Olympic 800m bronze medalist, was tucked into the pack while Andrews was at the back with another podium contender, Ben

Blankenship of Nike Oregon Track Club Elite, who would make the most important move of the race, surging hard at the bell.

"I really thought with the heat and everything I would be able to close well," Blankenship told the media.

Centrowitz immediately followed, and the two Oregon-based athletes charged down the backstretch while the rest of the field scrambled to catch up. Andrews, who was in fifth position at the bell, thought about the conversations he had with his coach, Jason Vigilante, prior to the race and knew what to do.

"I was expecting Matt, Cristian (Soratos) or someone else to take it pretty far out, and they did that. I just tucked in, stayed as patient as I could."

Blankenship would struggle in the final 200 meters, and eventually faded to 12th at the line. Murphy, who was later seen limping off the track then driven away in a golf cart, also faltered and finished last (he has the 800m final tomorrow). But Andrews got stronger as the last lap wore on, and was charging hard. He had no idea if he could win it, but he was all-in.

"Matthew's the Olympic champion; I'm not going to take anything for granted," Andrews said. "At one point I was racing for third, and then I was like, oh, I can get 'em, I'll go for second. And then I'm, like, I can win this thing!"

Barreling down lane two, Andrews got to the tape a step ahead of Centrowitz on the strength of a 52.23-second final lap, 3:43.29 to 3:43.41. Behind the two Olympians, Johnny Gregorek out-leaned recent Ole Miss grad Craig Engels, by 2/100ths of a second in 3:43.99, making his first world team. Soratos finished fifth.

"Today, third is as good as first," said Centrowitz who was happy to make his sixth consecutive national team for an outdoor global championships. "But, also disappointed that I couldn't win it."

Centrowitz and Gregorek both have the relevant IAAF qualifying standard of 3:36.00 (or 3:53.40 for the mile), while Andrews doesn't. He has until midnight, July 21, to get it.

"I'm going to try to get the standard as quick as I can, and represent the country at London," said Andrews.

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PHOTO: Jenny Simpson (far right) on her way to victory in the 1500m at the 2017 USATF Outdoor Track & Field Championships; Sacramento's Kate Grace is running fourth on her way to a second place finish. (photo by David Monti for Race Results Weekly)

In the women's 1500m, Olympic bronze medalist Jenny Simpson of Team New Balance won convincingly her fourth consecutive national title giving her a shot at her third IAAF World Championships medal (she has gold from 2011 and silver from 2013). Simpson, 30, ran tucked in the pack for the first circuit, then found some daylight when Shannon Osika of Saucony made a move with two laps to go. She decided her best strategy was to move to the front and ratchet down the pace, rather than counting on one huge move in the last lap.

"I really felt strongly that the majority of the field in this heat wasn't going to be able to just slowly ramp it up," Simpson explained. "I knew even if, you know, if you're leading you have to bridge that gap between not being foolish and being the leader that everybody just keys off of. So, I felt like the day, with the conditions, it was really about slowly, gently ramping it up and really kind of taking control and protecting being top three."

On the final circuit, only Nike's Kate Grace could come close to matching Simpson's speed. Simpson closed in 60.41 to Grace's 60.84, and the pair went one-two in 4:06.33 and 4:06.95, respectively.

"It's never easy and it feels really good to come in and make another team," Simpson said.

The battle for third was dramatic. Thirty-one year-old Sara Vaughn, a full-time real estate broker from Boulder, Colo., with three children, launched the sprint of her life down the homestretch to get past both Lauren Johnson of the BAA and Alexa Efraimson of Nike to take third in 4:07.85, making her first outdoor national track team (she competed in the 2012 IAAF World Indoor Championships).

Vaughn, who was all the way back in ninth place at the bell, ran her final 400 meters in 61.27 seconds, only slightly slower than Grace.

"I have an almost two year-old, she's 22 months, and her favorite line right now is, 'No, my turn, mine,'" a still stunned Vaughn told the media of her emotions at the finish line. "That's what I was thinking." The Brooks-sponsored athlete, who is now coached by her husband Brent, added: "To be a distance runner, in general, you have to be a little crazy."

All three women have run the IAAF qualifying standard of 4:07.50, so all three have locked in their team berths.

Three-time Olympian Shannon Rowbury eighth, still feeling some fatigue from last night's 5000m where she finished second.

"I knew I would be fatigued, but with drug testing, awards and all that yesterday it was just a late night," she told Race Results Weekly.

The women's steeplechase went to form with Emma Coburn of Team New Balance winning her sixth consecutive title with little drama in 9:20.28, her slowest winning time since 2013. Coburn, the 2016 Rio Olympic bronze medalist, used a similar strategy as Simpson, running from the front, slowly ramping up the pace, and gently pulling away from her 2016 Olympic teammates, Courtney Frerichs and Colleen Quigley of the Nike Bowerman Track Club who finished second and third, respectively, in 9:22.23 and 9:25.40. All three women ran well under the 9:42.00 IAAF qualifying time.

"You know, the U.S. Championships are always so important, and as the years go on there's kind of a double-edged sword where I feel more comfortable and more confident," Coburn said. "At the same time, I have more to lose because I want to keep my streak going, and the women's steeple is getting more and more competitive."

The fourth and final day of the USATF Outdoor Track & Field Championships will take place tomorrow at Hornet Stadium. Both the 800-meter finals for men and women will be contested, along with the men's 3000m steeplechase where Evan Jager will be going for his sixth straight title.