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RISING LIPARI MAKES FIRST USA OUTDOOR FINAL

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Emily Lipari (bib 64) competing at the Adrian Martinez Classic in Concord, Mass., in June, 2016 (photo by Chris Lotsbom for Race Results Weekly)

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (23-Jun) -- Rounding the final bend of her 1500m preliminary heat last here night at the USATF Outdoor Track & Field Championships at Hornet Stadium, Emily Lipari was back in fourth position, well behind Amanda Eccleston who boasts a 4:03.25 personal best. Lipari, who runs for the Boston Athletic Association's High Performance team (BAAHP), was acutely aware that only the top-3 in each heat would advance to Saturday's final. She knew she had to act, and act quickly.

"You know, when you're so close and I see that final 100 right there, there's just like something that just, you know, just heart," Lipari told Race Results Weekly after her race. "You just keep digging down."

The 24 year-old former high school soccer player from Roslyn, N.Y., who barely stands five feet tall, opened her stride in Sacramento's blistering heat and began to swing her arms furiously. Coming down the homestretch she started to catch Eccleston. Twenty meters became ten, and then five.

"I wish I could explain where the wheels are coming from in that last 100 meters, but it's just one of those things when I smell the finish line I just kind of get going, and can't slow myself down," Lipari marveled.

Inside of the last ten meters, Lipari edged past Eccleston to close her final circuit in 62.91 seconds and take third in 4:09.84 (Eccleston ended up advancing on time). For Lipari, who was the NCAA indoor mile champion in 2014 for Villanova University, it was the first time she had qualified for an outdoor national final. The race perhaps marked the end of a bumpy transition from the collegiate to the pro ranks under BAAHP coach Terrence Mahon.

"You know, it's been quite a ride for me," Lipari reflected. "My first two years as a pro was incredibly rough, and now I'm sort of coming out here with a vengeance."

In Lipari's first two seasons as a pro, she ran best times of 4:14.75 in 2015 and 4:12.31 in 2016, negligibly better than her best time from college (4:12.17). But at the end of last summer, after failing to qualify for the USA Olympic Trials, things started to look up. In August, Lipari won a road mile in the Boston area (where she lives), setting a course record of 4:27.19, and also won a well-regarded road mile in Minnesota, upsetting three-time USA road mile champion Heather Kampf. She worked on building her strength in the fall, which culminated in a fifth place finish at the USA Club Cross Country Championships last December, helping her BAAHP team win the overall title. She took that momentum into this year with and a fourth place finish at the highly competitive Great Edinburgh Cross Country in Scotland where Lipari again showed her powerful finishing kick.

"It's all about, like, reading body language, too," Lipari said of her finish tactics. "You see people tired. You're tired. I'd rather cross the finish, like, sprawled out on the floor knowing I gave it my all and not make it, rather than kind of giving up that last 50."

During this year's track season, Lipari dropped her 1500m PB to 4:08.98 at the USATF Distance Classic in Los Angeles in May, then backed up that performance up with a slightly faster 4:08.29 clocking later last month at the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, Ore. Those marks assured her of a starting spot here in Sacramento.

Lipari, who always wears a headband when she races, faces long odds in the final competing against top stars like global medalists Jenny Simpson and Shannon Rowbury, both of whom have run well under four minutes during their careers. But Lipari isn't intimidated, and will give it her all. She just wants to see more growth in her still budding professional career.

"Like, I have nothing to lose and really everything to prove," she said.

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