

2022 National USATF Junior Olympic
Track & Field Championships

USATF Pacific Youth Features



Ava Torgersen

Oakland, CA

Girls 11-12 Division, Gold 1,500
Meters Race Walk

By Bob Burns

Ava Torgersen didn't have to wait long to put her stamp on the USATF National Junior Olympic Championships in Sacramento. The 1,500-meter race walk for girls 11-12 was the first event on the seven-day schedule, the early-morning gun sounding at 7:30 a.m. on July 25.

Torgersen, competing for the Oakland Cubs youth track team, claimed the meet's first gold medal by taking the lead from the start and expanding it to more than a minute and a half by the finish. Torgersen's winning time was 7 minutes, 18.45 seconds, far in front of the silver medalist, Guiliana Gabriele of the Pacific Coast Shock Waves in Southern California (9:11.44).

"It felt good to be rewarded for all the hard work," Torgersen said of her first national title.



Ava Torgersen, 1,500 Meters Race Walk Girls 11-12 Division, wins Gold.



“Ava’s a super-focused kid,” said Ava’s mother and coach, Andrea Johnson. “Her goal (at Junior Olympics) was to get three podium finishes, and she did it. She has her eye on the target and will do what it takes.”

Ava’s athletic ability was apparent from the moment she started competing in age-group track six years ago. What makes her story unusual is that she incorporated one of the most technical – and misunderstood – events into her portfolio – the race walk.

There’s a story behind that. Ava is friends with Talia Green, an Oakland teenager who qualified the 2022 World Athletics U20 Championships as a member of the U.S. team in the women’s 10,000-meter race walk.

“She’s my role model,” Ava said.

In fact, Torgersen’s time was 70 seconds faster than the winner of the boys 11-12 1,500 walk. She wasn’t done, either: The seventh-grader from Oakland also placed fourth in the javelin (103 feet, 9 inches) and fourth in the 1,500-meter run (5:00.13).

Said her mother: “It definitely helps having someone older doing well, seeing the gear she received for making the national team. It definitely motivates Ava – and it’s a sweet thing to watch.”

Like Ava, Talia also competes in running events. When Ava showed an interest in following her friend's footsteps, Andrea enrolled in some clinics and watched hours of video to learn more about the heel-and-toe event.

The sport's rules mandate that a race walker's knees must stay straight through most of the leg swing and one foot remain in contact with the ground at all times. Walkers are seen by some to be a curious sideshow.

"Some people underestimate it," Ava said. "It takes a lot of practice. Talia and my mom are helping me."

As for the future, she plans to follow in her role model's footsteps.

"I want to make it to the U20 Worlds and then the Olympics," Torgersen said.

She's certainly off to a good start.