

2022 National USATF Junior Olympic
Track & Field Championships

USATF Pacific Youth Features



Elias Thronson

Sacramento, CA

Boys 11-12 Division, Silver 3,000 Meters (both Gold & Silver broke the 1998 National record) and Silver 1,500 Meters

By Bob Burns

Elias Thronson's training had been going great. His strategy for the boys 11-12 3,000 meters at the USATF National Junior Olympic Championships was sensibly focused on wearing down his top-seeded opponent and possibly even challenging the national record for 3,000 meters.

What the young Sacramento runner didn't expect was to see another runner cross the finish line first. But that's what happened in one of the most exciting track races at the Junior Olympics in late July, which attracted 6,000 athletes from 50 states for seven days of competition to Sacramento State's Hornet Stadium.

After pulling away from the presumptive favorite, Michael Studer of Lowell, Mass., Thronson thought he saw clear sailing to the tape. In the sun-baked stands, his father and coach, Eric, saw their strategy working to perfection.



3,000 Meters: Thronson (left) passes Studer with a lap to go.

“When Elias took off with a lap to go, I thought holy cow, he’s got this, and I could see from the (stadium) clock that he had a shot at the national record,” Eric Thronson said. “What I hadn’t paid attention to was (Quenton) Lanese, who hadn’t followed their pace but started closing fast on the last half-lap.”

Lanese, an 11-year-old from Olympia, Wash., overhauled Thronson in the homestretch and won in 9 minutes, 31.17 seconds. Thronson was second in 9:35.74 with Studer third in 9:59.50. Lanese and Thronson both bettered the national boys 11-12 record of 9:38.52, set way back in 1998.

Age-group stars aren’t used to losing, and Thronson was disconsolate immediately following the race. But Lanese was a gracious winner, helping the runner-up put his accomplishment in perspective. Later that day, he said something that made his father almost as proud as his performance on the track.

“Dad, I learned something today,” Elias told his father. “I learned that I don’t have to be so anxious before a race. All I need is to do my best. If I do my best, I’m happy, whether I’m first, second or fiftieth, and today I did my best.”

The following day, Lanese, Thronson and Studer squared off again in the boys 11-12 1,500 meters. Lanese completed his distance double with a 4:31.47 win over Thronson (4:4:33.91) and Studer (4:38.63). Thronson’s Junior Olympic clocking in the 1,500 equates to a 4:55 mile, fast footing for someone who hasn’t yet entered seventh grade.

It didn’t take long for Eric and Tara to realize their oldest child liked to run. “He’s the kind of kid who was running the minute he started walking,” Eric said.

Elias began competing at age 7 and finished second in his age division at the USATF National Junior Olympic Cross Championships the following year. He runs for the Delta Hawks, a youth club based out of West Sacramento coached by his father. Eric’s eight-year-old daughter, Josie, also runs for the Delta Hawks.

Eric Thronson was a top high school runner in Washington state who competed collegiately at Tulane University. His son seems determined to follow a similar path.

“I like running because I’m good at it, but it’s also a lot of fun, practicing with my teammates,” Elias said. “I especially like the feeling you get after finishing a hard workout.”

Thronson’s next big goal is the Junior Olympics Cross Country Championships, to be held Dec. 10 in College Station, Texas. As he left Hornet Stadium after picking up his second silver medal on July 31, the meet’s final day, Texas already was on his mind.

“The year isn’t over yet,” Elias informed his father.