



Former Buff Nelson struggles in steeplechase at U.S. Championships

Merritt, Richards cruise to 400 crowns

Camera staff, wire report
Sunday, June 28, 2009

EUGENE, Ore. -- Billy Nelson finished second in the 3,000-meter steeplechase at the U.S. Championships last summer when the meet served as the Olympic Trials. The former University of Colorado athlete didn't fair as well Saturday.

Nelson started strong at Hayward Field, leading the first four laps of the race. But, with about three laps to go, Nelson appeared to lose momentum as he was passed by four racers in a 15-second span. Nelson was unable to regain any ground and dropped back to 13th where he would finish in 8 minutes, 52.49 seconds. Joshua McAdams won the steeplechase in 8:29.91.

While Nelson struggled, LaShawn Merritt and Sanya Richards made their 400-meter races look like strolls around the track.

With no Jeremy Wariner in the field, Merritt was missing his only real rival and quickly pulled away from the field. The Olympic gold medalist, who beat Wariner in Beijing, won in 44.50 seconds, tying his world-best time for 2009.

Now that's a birthday present.

Merritt turned 23 on Saturday, but doesn't plan to celebrate until returning home to Virginia.

"I'm getting old, getting old," he said, laughing.

Wariner competed in the first heat of the 200-meter dash, finishing second (20.77) to Bernard Williams (20.72). Current Buff Jeremy Dodson was third in that heat with a time of 20.78, but finished 20th overall and missed qualifying for the semifinals by four spots. Former Buff Ryan Campbell was 32nd (21.00) in the 200 qualifying.

Two-time Olympic bronze medalist Walter Dix pulled out of the 200 field a day after injuring his right hamstring while running in the semifinals of the 100.

Dwight Phillips drew the biggest ovation of the night from the crowd when he leapt 28 feet, 1½ inches in the long jump on his second attempt.

That jump was good enough to win gold and banish some personal demons at Hayward Field.

The 2004 Olympic gold medalist endured an injury-riddled 2008 and missed out on a trip to Beijing in this stadium.

“It’s always frustrating when, most of my career I’ve made every team I’ve tried out for,” he said. “Not to make the Olympic team was very disappointing ... I’m not looking back.”

Lashinda Demus (400 hurdles), Brad Walker (pole vault), Shannon Rowbury (1,500), Kara Patterson (javelin), A.G. Kruger (hammer), Josh McAdams (steeplechase) and Tim Seaman (20K walk) also won titles Saturday.

The U.S. Championships conclude today and Colorado star Jenny Barringer will compete in the 3,000-meter steeplechase final at 2:14 p.m. (KUSA, 9). Barringer won her qualifying heat on Friday, despite the water barrier being six inches higher than it should have been.

She ran in the first heat and cruised to a mark of 9:47.94 and was 3.22 seconds ahead of Penn State’s Bridget Franek, who finished in 9:51.16. Barringer’s mark was the top time in the prelims.



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Goucher gets kick out of 5K title

Associated Press
Sunday, June 28, 2009

EUGENE, Ore. -- Kara Goucher conquered her kick.

The middle-distance runner-turned marathoner entered the 5,000 meters at the U.S. nationals for the sole purpose of feeling more comfortable with her kick -- that burst of speed that can often decide a race.

The former University of Colorado star had felt uncomfortable with her ability to turn it on late at the Boston Marathon, where she finished third.

"I don't usually fear the kick, but in Boston I did, big time," she said after winning the 5,000 on Friday night. "And I think it cost me."

Goucher, who lives in Portland and trains under three-time New York City Marathon winner Alberto Salazar, won the 5,000 meters last summer at the Olympic Trials in Eugene, for her first national title. She was second in the 10,000 meters and went on to run in both events in Beijing.

Last September, Goucher announced she was turning her focus to the marathon.

She finished third in New York City, becoming the first American woman to earn a top-three finish in the event in 14 years. Her time of 2 hours, 25 minutes and 53 seconds was the fastest marathon debut by an American woman.

In Boston, Goucher didn't have enough left for a finishing kick. She was outsprinted to the finish line by Salina Kosgei and defending champion Dire Tune, who traded places several times on the last few blocks before Kosgei hit the tape 1 second ahead. Goucher was 9 seconds behind the Kenyan winner.

Goucher purposely didn't enter the 10,000 meters at the national championships this week so that she wouldn't be tempted to run the event at the worlds in Berlin -- along with the marathon.

With her speed demons vanquished, Goucher heads to Berlin in August with confidence.

"I'm excited for it. It will be like finding out who I am as a marathoner," she said.



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