

Maine athletes' start times at U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials

At Eugene, Oregon
(All times EDT)

Thursday, June 30
Noon, men's 20K race walk final (Matthew Forgues, Boothbay)

Friday, July 1
7:15 p.m., men's 800 first round (Isaiah Harris, Lewiston)
7:45 p.m., women's 800 first round (Carsyn Koch, Wade)
8:10 p.m., women's long jump qualifying (Kate Hall, Casco)
9:15 p.m., men's 10,000 final (Ben True, North Yarmouth)

Saturday, July 2
2:43 p.m., women's 800 semifinals
2:45 p.m., women's long jump finals
3 p.m., men's 800 semifinals

Monday, July 4
8:02 p.m., men's 5,000 first round (Riley Masters, Veazie; True)
8:42 p.m., women's 800 final
8:51 p.m., men's 800 final

Thursday, July 7
11 a.m., **6:15 p.m.**, women's shot put (Becky O'Brien, Cumberland)
10:21 p.m., men's 1,500 first round (Masters undecided)

Friday, July 8
7:12 p.m., men's 1,500 semifinals

Saturday, July 9
8:20 p.m., men's 5,000 final

Sunday, July 10
8:20 p.m., men's 1,500 final

O'Brien to compete in Trials' shot put

BY ERNIE CLARK
BDN STAFF

A seventh Mainer who will compete in this year's U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials is shot putter Becky O'Brien of Cumberland, a third-year assistant track coach at the University of Southern Maine in Gorham.

The 25-year-old O'Brien participated in the 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials in the discus and the shot put, and placed second in the shot put at the 2015 USATF Indoor Championships with a career-best throw of 18.34 meters (60 feet, 2 inches).

She has a qualifying effort of 17.68 meters for the 2016 Trials in the shot put. American record holder Michelle Carter has the top qualifying mark of 20.21 meters.

O'Brien was a scholastic national champion in the shot put with a throw of 52 feet, 1 inch while a student at Greely High School in Cumberland Center.

She is a 2012 graduate of the University of Buffalo, where she set school and Mid-American Conference records for the shot put both indoors (57-7) and outdoors (56-6), and the discus (193-7).

The Olympic Trials women's shot put competition is scheduled for July 7.

Phelps

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"At the big meets we have great races and we are right there with each other tomorrow in the middle of the pool. It's going to be good," said Phelps. "We're going to be out and probably step on the gas a little bit more than we have in the past.

"Even if he is hurt I don't think he is going to let anything be an excuse.

"Him and I together have had a pretty decent rivalry back and forth and we've been able to really push each other and I would expect that tomorrow."

Katie Ledecky, who is battling Phelps for top billing at the trials and has already secured Olympic spots in the 200 and 400 free, was also back at the CenturyLink Center looking to add the 100 free to her Rio dance card.

Venus

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court," Murray said after easily beating Lu Yen-hsun on Centre Court.

"They do a pretty good job of trying to put the best matches for the fans ... rather than it just being the big names that play on the big courts."

Asked if she could imagine a five-time men's champion being on an outside court, Venus added: "I haven't seen that in the scheduling yet."

Koch

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hard work into this, too much time and energy, so that I'm not going there just to run," Koch said. "My goal right now is to make it to Round 2, which I think is a good goal. There are people in my life telling me that's too low of a goal, but for me I need to get past one barrier before I can look at the next one.

"It will be an honor to be there in the first place, but I definitely don't want to go with the mindset of just being happy to be there. I am there to compete and do my best."

Championship pedigree

Neither the small Aroostook County hamlet of Wade — population 283 as of the 2010 U.S. Census — where Koch lives nor neighboring Washburn projects itself as a spawning ground for elite middle-distance runners, with the nearest track-and-field complex some 15 miles away in Caribou.

But as the daughter of Peter and Liane Koch enrolled at Washburn District High School, running was merely one facet of what would become a broad athletic experience.

By the time she finished her first winter of high school, Koch already was a Class C cross-country individual state champion and part of a Class D state title team in basketball. The winning never stopped.

She went on to capture four straight individual cross-country state titles and helped the Beavers win the 2012 Class C team crown — they lost to Orono the next year by a single point.

She also played soccer for three autumns and as a senior helped Washburn win the 2013 Class D state championship.

That dual-sport allegiance routinely required Koch to juggle two after-school obligations each day.

"For Carsyn to split her physical energy between two sports in the fall was pretty taxing," said Michael Waugh, Koch's cross-country coach at Washburn. "But she never approached anything like she was saving herself for a race or a soccer game. She always did whatever she was doing at the time at 100 percent. She would do it full bore with a full heart and leave it all out on the field or on the course."

Koch also thrived on the basketball court, helping Washburn to four consecutive Class D state championships between 2011 and 2014.

But it was during the outdoor track season where Koch's athletic versatility may have been most pronounced. She captured seven individual state championships in five different events at distances ranging from 100 meters to 1,600 meters and also including a Class C state record of 5-5½ in the high jump as a senior.

She didn't know yet how good she could be at any single event or any single sport, but that wasn't a priority at the time.

"I had so many great experiences from high school," said Koch, whose state track titles included two in the 800 as a freshman and as a sophomore. "I can think of basketball games in particular where you just had to grit your teeth and do what you needed to do to win or to meet the objective.

"You definitely learned different competitive lessons and a big part of running is the mental game. In that way I think have a little advantage over some people now, and I also feel a lot of my potential is just starting to come out because I wasn't pushed as hard running in high school."

Finding the right fit

Koch took her wide-ranging resume to Cedarville University — an independent Christian college of 3,700 students in southwestern Ohio not far from Dayton — in pursuit of a nursing degree.

That resume piqued Bolender's interest.

Women

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"They're going to play however much they earn," Fightmaster added. "They are not going to be in the starting lineup every night so we can sell more tickets. It's a big game on July 1 and they'll both be in the lineup, and after that we'll see what their performance dictates."

If this sounds like it has the makings of a Hollywood movie, then it might not be completely surprising that the impetus for the signings came from a legendary director: Francis Ford Coppola. His winery, Virginia Dare, entered into a partnership with the nearby team, and Coppola pitched the idea to Fightmaster.

"My family would play co-ed baseball games and inevitably the star player would always be an aunt who could run and hit and that made the games so much more fun," Coppola said in a statement.

"When watching Major League Baseball, I always wondered why there couldn't be a co-ed team. It's the one major sport in which



KYLE TERWILLEGAR

Carsyn Koch (center) of Washburn competes in the 800-meter final at the NCAA Div. II Track and Field Championships held May 28 in Bradenton, Florida. The Washburn native, running for Cedarville University in Ohio, placed first in the event to follow up her national title from March in the indoor 800.

"I could tell when she's a state champion in cross-country and a state champion in the high jump and a state champion in soccer and a state champion in basketball that she clearly was talented," he recalled. "It's just been figuring out how that was all going to shake out."

Koch's collegiate sporting focus shook out rather quickly once Bolender saw her set a school record of 1:15.36 at the unique distance of 500 meters as a freshman.

"She did that, and she didn't really look like she had started running yet," he said. "That was one of the early indicators. She had a pretty good freshman cross-country season as well."

Koch found the transitions from cross-country to indoor track — for the first time in her career — and then to outdoor track in the spring both complementary and productive.

"You can really see all of that buildup come to fruition and all the hard work you put in during cross-country to build your base and indoor track when you do a little quicker stuff leading to the spring when you really hit it hard and you see your times drop because of how the whole training program develops you," she said.

Koch became Cedarville's first female NCAA All-American in 2015 after finishing second in the 800 at the Division II outdoor championships in 2:05.21. She also set six school records — the 500 and distance medley relay indoors and the 400, 800, 1,500 and 4x800 relay outdoors.

All the while she kept inching closer to devoting her energies to a specific distance.

"She'd run 2:21 in high school in the 800 so I was thinking that this girl could run at least 2:10, which is way off from where she is now," said Bolender. "But then when she ran a 2:05 at the end of her freshman year and she ran a 54-second 400 and a 4:24 1,500, at that point I knew she was pretty good and at least had the potential to do what she's done now."

On the elite track

Koch's growth in the 800 has merely escalated during the last 12 months.

She won the NCAA Division II championship indoors last winter with a meet record and new PR of

2:05.12, then moved outdoors and saw her 800 times continue to drop.

In mid-April, she trekked to California for the Mt. SAC Relays at Mount San Antonio College and finished in 2:03.58. Two weeks later she returned to the West Coast for the Payton Jordan Invitational and became the fastest women's 800 runner in NCAA Division II history while also besting the 2:03.00 U.S. Olympic Trials qualifying standard.

"It had been a really stressful time for me. It was the week before finals and I had been pulled out of school a lot during spring semester, so it was a difficult decision for me to even go there in the first place because I didn't want to impact my academics," said Koch, her class valedictorian at Washburn and a dean's list student at Cedarville.

"But I decided that a couple of B's are fine if you hit an Olympic Trials standard. It's fine if I don't get all A's this semester. It's OK, so I went and it was a really good decision because when I crossed that finish line it felt so good to see so much hard work pay off."

Koch's highlight-reel spring wasn't done — she won the 800 title at the NCAA Division II outdoor championships in 2:03.48.

"She's a great kid, too," said Bolender. "It's especially nice when you're working with kids who are so humble and so thankful. Not every kid is like that, but with all the success Carsyn's had she's really strong in her faith as well and she's been great to work with. She's just a super humble, nice kid."

The next challenge

Koch's Olympic Trials qualifying time is tied for 28th best among runners who intend to compete in the women's 800 — with the top six times all under two minutes.

"I want Carsyn to understand that this accomplishment in and of itself is pretty amazing, but also to go there and just focus on doing her best," Bolender said. "I want her to just enjoy the opportunity she has and the fact she's already accomplished this and then control what you can control, run your best and see what happens."

Koch sees her rapid improvement and the sudden nature of her qualification for the Trials as potentially working to her benefit.

"For a lot of people going into



Carsyn Koch

these trials this has been a goal for years or since they were a little kid, they've trained and trained to get here and now here comes the pinnacle moment," she said. "For me, I didn't even think this was a possibility two years ago and I think I have a lot more to give. It's just finding those new ways to bring it out."

Her high school cross-country coach believes the quality of the field will bring out the best in Koch at Hayward Field.

"She's craved better competition," said Waugh. "She always wanted to face off with the best because she knew she could run with them if she had the chance. In a lot of ways I'm really not surprised about this because every time she gets the opportunity to run with the best, she elevates her performance."

The event at a minimum should be a learning experience for Koch with an eye toward possible future national and international competitions.

"It's tough to set goals when you're in my position because I really don't know what I have left to give right now," she said. "I don't want to shortchange myself, but at the same time this is more competition than I've ever run against so I understand that every single person who has made it to this level has either some sort of potential left or already has reached it and is super fast.

"I try to remind myself that there are other people who are faster than me, but I'm faster than other people, too."

weight and strength come less into play. So when my Sonoma winery became involved with the Stompers, I had the opportunity to turn this thought into a reality and recruit these amazing women capable of playing alongside men."

"When Francis tells you to try, you try," Fightmaster told MLB.com.

Both Whitmore and Piagno are set to play for Team USA this fall in the Women's Baseball World Cup in South Korea. Whitmore, who recently graduated from high school, will also attend Cal State Fullerton on a softball

scholarship. Piagno, who no-hit Puerto Rico at the 2015 Pan Am Games, was a college softball player at the University of Tampa.

Even though the Stompers came into existence in 2014, this is not the first time they have made history. That year, former MLB star Bill Lee started a game for Sonoma and became, at age 67, the oldest person to get a professional win.

In 2015, Stompers pitcher Sean Conroy became the first openly gay professional baseball player. He made his first start on the team's Pride Night, throwing a

complete-game shutout as his teammates wore rainbow-striped socks.

"While many believe it's only a matter of time before we see a woman playing in the MLB, I've learned over the past several months that there are many steps in between where we are and where we should be in terms of women in this sport," Fightmaster said in a statement.

"We hope this sends a message to the rest of the baseball world that there is room for women and girls in this game — from Little League to the Major Leagues."

UMaine

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He said the "great field" will give his Black Bears one of the toughest nonconference schedules in the country.

Barron's Black Bears will be extremely young. He has big incoming freshman class after graduating six of his top seven players.

"In some ways, it's healthy for incoming kids to have a rude introduction to college basketball," said Barron. "They will realize the work that goes into it, how they have to compete and what's at stake. We won four games four years ago but the team averaged 22 wins the past three seasons. The kids we are bringing in are better than the freshmen class from four years ago. If we can go better than .500 in

led its sport in the America East Academic Cup standings for the second straight year with a 3.47 grade-point average.

The University of New Hampshire won the overall Academic Cup for the second straight year, while UMaine ranked fifth among conference schools with a 3.16 GPA.

The Academic Cup, established by the America East board of directors in 1995, is

presented to the institution whose student-athletes post the highest grade-point average during that academic year.

Every America East institution and 75 percent (104-of-139) of its teams averaged better than a 3.0 GPA collectively in 2015-16. America East student-athletes averaged a 3.15 GPA overall in 2015-16, the highest single-year mark in league history and the fourth straight year a new standard has been set.

Maine tops AE women's basketball GPA

The University of Maine women's basketball team