

Christie and Stevens become Olympic Trials Champions in the 20km race walk

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Nick Christie and Robyn Stevens celebrate after winning the Olympic Trials 20K Race Walk in Downtown Springfield. Photo by Otto Horiuchi

By Kate Walkup

SPRINGFIELD, Ore. – Nick Christie and Robyn Stevens both started off with commanding leads and held that position through the finish in the men’s and women’s 20km race walk on the seventh day of competition at the 2020 Track and Field Olympic Trials.

Although neither Trials champion finished under the Olympic standard—Christie finished in 1:30:48 and Stevens finished in 1:35:13—both competitors could still make their Olympic debut in Tokyo, given their world rankings.



Nick Christie (left) crosses the line as the. 20K race walk national champion, with his girlfriend Robyn Stevens (right) getting caught up in the finish line tape as she begins her last lap of the 1K course. Photo by Otto Horiuchi

Christie, of Vacaville, Calif., who also competed in the 50km race walk Olympic Trials in January of this year, has become a dominant race walker in the U.S. over the past few years. He has won 19 national championships from distances ranging from one mile to 50km.

“I was going into the Olympic Trials with a very specific set of marks I needed to hit to qualify,” Christie said. “I thought I was in much better shape than my result showed. I got through 8k/7k and my body was really tired.”

Due to significant heat in the Willamette Valley, the race was moved from a 9:00 a.m. start to a 7:00 a.m. start, but the athletes still raced in 70-degree heat.

The Olympic Trials champion still holds the indoor NAIA 3,000m national record that he set in 2013 during his collegiate career at Missouri Baptist University. In high school, Christie competed in the long jump and pole vault but switched to race walking in college, where he became a five-time NAIA All-American.

Stevens is also from Vacaville, Calif. (the two athletes are a couple) and retired from the sport in 2004 but came back 10 years later. The now Olympic Trials champion has improved ever since her return to the sport. Her Olympic Trials win marks the largest margin of victory in Trials history.

“My plan going in was first of all to just arrive to the starting line with no injuries,” Stevens said. “I knew it was supposed to get hot, so I was basically just trying to pace myself for a win.”

Stevens is the defending national champion who became the first woman to win both the 50km race walk and 20km race walk national championships in back-to-back years. In February, Stevens won the 2021 USATF National 35km Championship.

“I felt strong, like I could’ve kept it up, but I wanted to be smart and ensure that I kept my spot,” Stevens said. “The first few laps felt pretty comfortable.”

Daniel Nehnevaj took second in the men’s race, finishing in 1:31:59, and Emmanuel Corvera finished in 1:34:38 to round out the podium. With only several laps of the 1km-loop course remaining, Corvera received a two-minute penalty and had to sit in the penalty box before finishing. Although fourth place was only two minutes and 48 seconds behind Corvera, he managed to hold onto his place, finishing in third—the spot he had been in before getting penalized.

Maria Micheta-Coffey finished second in the women’s race in 1:39:25, and Miranda Melville took third with a finishing time of 1:40:39. Nineteen-year-old Taylor Ewert, who has been the USATF National Junior (U20) 10km Race Walk Champion every year since 2017, started off at a quick pace, but the college freshman dropped back and finished sixth with a time of 1:43:41.

“I think it’s just that Nick and I both think that every day is a new day, and we try to make every day the best day possible for us,” Stevens said. “We give everything our best and we try to make every day better than the last.”



Robyn Stevens (right) and Taylor Ewert (left) come around the bend in the early stages of the Olympic Trials 20K Race Walk. Photo by Otto Horiuchi

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