

# Olympians and Olympic Hopefuls Share the Track at the Portland Track Festival

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**Hobbs Kessler’s 3:34.36 1500 meter run at the 2021 Portland Track Festival broke Alan Webb’s national high school record, as well as Jim Ryun’s American U20 Record. Kessler (pictured left) celebrates with training partner Mason Ferlic. Photo by Otto Horiuchi**

By Kate Walkup

PORTLAND, Ore. – Olympians and rising high school stars shared the track with the same goal in mind—a ticket to Tokyo —at the Portland Track Festival on Saturday night at Lewis and Clark College.

High school senior standout Hobbs Kessler of Ann Arbor Skyline (Mich.) finished fifth in the men’s 1,500 meters with a time of 3:34.36, shattering Alan Webb’s 20-year-old national high school record by nearly four seconds. Kessler also achieved the Olympic standard and finished under the NCAA record time of 3:34.68 set earlier this season by Yared Nuguse.

“I really just wanted to make the Trials,” Kessler said. “I thought 3:36 at best.”

Craig Engels won the event, finishing with a time of 3:33.64. Although the time and performance itself wasn’t impressive to him, Engels said he felt ready for the Olympic Trials.

“For the last year and a half, I don’t really know what my motivation has been,” Engels said. “Now my motivation is making the Olympic team for my family and myself.”

However, Kessler’s record-breaking race and the winning performance by Engels weren’t the only noteworthy 1,500m moments of the night. T38 para-athlete Nate Riech crossed the finish line with a new world best in the event with a time of 3:47.89, and five high school boys broke the 3:50 barrier in the boys’ elite 1,500m.

Gabriela DeBues-Stafford led the top six finishers in the women’s 800m dash under the two-minute mark.

Stafford broke Kate Grace’s meet record of 1:59.30 from 2017, running a 1.12-second PR of 1:58.70. Sabrina Southerland finished second to Stafford with a time of 1:58.82 and broke two minutes for the first time in her running career.

“I kept going 2:00.8 or 2:00.7, so it feels great to finally break it,” Southerland said. “It’s nice to know that I’m in shape now.”



**Oregon Track Club Elite’s Sabrina Southerland on her way to breaking the 2-minute barrier in the 800-meters at the 2021 Portland Track Festival. Photo by Jake Willard**

Following the women’s 800m performances, the top five men in the 800m crossed the finish line under the Olympic Trials qualifying time and the top two – Donovan Brazier and Tonatiu Lopez - finished with Olympic standards.

Lopez Lomong and Grant Fisher won their respective heats of the men’s 5,000m. Fisher finished with a time of 13:19.52, beating Lomong’s earlier time of 13:26.11. Fisher also broke the meet record of 13:19.78.

To conclude the Portland Track Festival, Australian Jessica Hull won the women’s 5,000m with a photo-finish lean at the line. She led the top three finishers under the 15-minute mark with a time of 14:57.00—her second time under 15 minutes.

“It wasn’t about time tonight,” said Hull. “It was about competing hard. Craig and Donovan put some pressure on to take the win tonight by running so well earlier, so I definitely felt like I had to grit my teeth on that final stretch for our team.”

Hull, already named to the Australian Olympic Team, will continue to train through the month of June while some of her competitors will shift their focus to their respective Olympic Trials. The 2020 U.S. Olympic Team Trials – Track & Field will take place at Hayward Field at the University of Oregon, June 18–27, 2021.

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