

Saturday, 26 June 2010

## USATF Nationals - Combined Events, Day 1



Tom Pappas putting the Shot in the Decathlon at the 2010 USATF Nationals (Getty Images)

Des Moines, Iowa - Tom Pappas and Hyleas Fountain were in the top spots after the first day of the US Combined Events Championships at Drake University in Des Moines on Friday (25).

The championships are part of the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge**.

Pappas, the Paris World Championships decathlon gold medallist who has often fought against recurring injuries in past year seems to have those problems mostly solved as he posted a solid 4234 score after the first five events.

Meanwhile, Fountain, the Beijing silver medallist, found herself in the midst of a career day with a lifetime-best 4068 after the opening session.

### Decathlon

Early-season competitions in Europe found America's top two decathletes - Bryan Clay and Trey Hardee - coming home with nagging injuries making them unavailable for the US Championships. Enter Pappas, the five-time US champion who, at age 32, suddenly found himself as the clear pre-meet favorite. His 4234 on the first day justified that bit of flattery.

The top points in the 100 Metres went to those running in the first heat, which was buoyed by a 3.3 wind, compared with the moderate 1.5 accompanying the second heat. University athlete Trinity Otto, the 3rd-place finisher two weeks ago in the NCAA decathlon, led all competitors with a 10.73 for 922 points, with Joe Detmer (10.80 [906 points]), Miller Moss (10.81 [903]) and Pappas (11.00 [861]) following Otto across the line.

Jake Arnold, who ran under eleven seconds for the first time ten days ago in Kladno, did not have the same wind advantage while clocking 11.08 to win the second heat for 843 points.

Otto held on to his lead after the Long Jump with a best of 7.40, the day's top performance. It left him with an 1832 total and a 33-point lead over Detmer, who maintained his second spot with a 7.33 leap and an aggregate 1799. Pappas held fourth with a 7.26 performance and a total of 1737, as he trailed Moss's 1755 by only 18 points after the latter's 7.16 best.

The Shot Put was a most telling event, as a magnificent 16.87 moved Pappas into the overall lead with 2642. On only one previous time - the 2008 Olympic Trials - had the former world champion thrown farther (17.26). Far back of Pappas with the second-best put was Daniel Kinsey at 15.02, but when combined with his comparatively weak marks in the first two events, it left him only in ninth.

The Pappas surge nudged Otto down to the second spot with 2541 as a result of a 13.69 mark, with Detmer holding third at 2428 after a 12.37 thrust. Meanwhile, Mark Jellison moved into overall fourth at 2411 with an excellent 13.93 effort, as Moss tumbled to fifth with 2400 after a 12.63 throw.

Pappas further solidified his lead with a 2.05 leap in the High Jump for a four-event 3492 score. Combined with the 1.93 from Otto, it allowed Pappas a 211-point bulge over the Texan's 3281 with the 400 metres remaining. Detmer meanwhile responded with an outdoor PB 1.99 and stayed in third with a cumulative 3222, while Arnold performed near PB level with a 2.02 to move into a fourth-place tie at 3205 with Jellison after the latter's 1.99.

Given his performances in the 400 Metres over the last few seasons, it was predictable that Pappas would shed a portion of his advantage in the day's final event. But it was not expected that he would end the day with a 51.60—his slowest one-lap time in almost 15 years—and see his lead shrink to only 82 points as Otto cruised to a 48.79, only 0.01 off his career best, as the leader board read 4234 and 4152 as the competitors retired for the night.

Detmer (47.78) and Moss (47.90) both performed at their recent sub-48 levels for overall scores of 4142 and 4108, respectively, as Arnold (49.22 [4056]) and Mat Clark (49.20 [4011]) rounded out the list of six competitors over the benchmark 4000 points after the first day.

### Heptathlon

With no one expected to challenge her over the next two days, Hyleas Fountain had as her main goal, after her non-finish in Götzis, simply to score as many points as she could.

And punching through the 1100-point level on the first two events, the Fountain juggernaut eventually swept all four events, ending up with a lifetime first-day best of 4068, exceeding the 4060 she accumulated when leading the Beijing Olympics after the opening session.

Today, the Olympic silver medallist started with a determined 12.93 time in the 100 Metres Hurdles to open the competition and registered 1135 points, almost 100 more than the 1039 collected by Aisha Adams after a 13.58 run. Emily Pearson and Kasey Hill shared the third spot with 13.72 and 1018 points.

The High Jump saw Fountain continue her tear with a PB 1.90 jump which brought 1106 points for a two-event total of 2241. Bettie Wade, who represented the US in the Berlin World Championships, leaped 1.81 as did Adreona Bradford. That added 991 points to the totals for each, which stood at 2001 and 1995, respectively.

Sharon Day, also in Berlin in both the heptathlon and the individual high jump, was off her usual form and found her limit at 1.78. She stood in fifth overall with 1914, behind the 1934 of Dorcas Akinniyi.

Fountain continued to show her supremacy over the Heptathlon field with a 13.73 in the Shot Put which resulted in a three-event 3017. Hill rose to the occasion in this event with a big PB improvement to 13.67 to rank just behind Fountain in the shot put, but her 2561 total was only enough for fifth place overall at this point.

Wade and Day were two-three after efforts of 12.32 and 13.22 yielded cumulative totals of 2683 and 2656, respectively. Akinniyi slipped back after an 11.55 put but was still able to barely hold fourth with 2565.

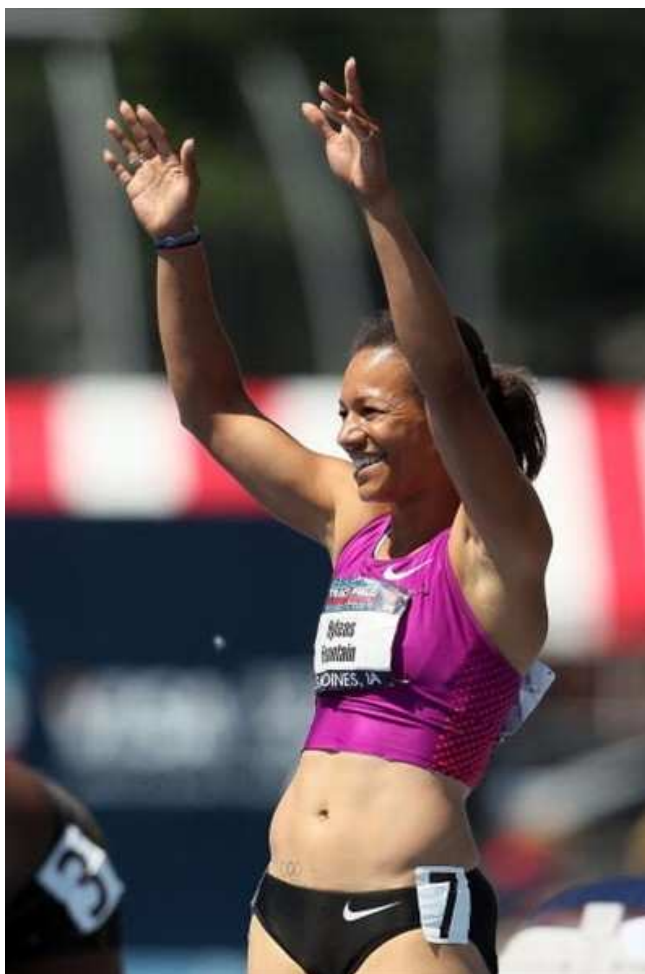
Covering the 200 Metres in 23.28, Fountain (*pictured right*) ended the first day with a remarkable 4068 total, the feat being all the more incredible without a real challenge from any of the other competitors. Bettie Wade clocked a near-PB 24.64 for an overnight total of 3603 and stayed four points ahead of Sharon Day, who held fast to third with a PB 24.40 and 3599 points.

### Ed Gordon for the IAAF



Sunday, 27 June 2010

## Fountain sets world leading 6735pts at USATF Nationals – Combined Events, Day 2



Hyleas Fountain after winning the Heptathlon at the 2010 USATF Nationals (Getty Images)

Des Moines, Iowa, USA - The second day of the USA Combined Events Championships saw Jake Arnold make a big comeback on Saturday (26) for his first US national Decathlon crown while Hyleas Fountain posted a world-leading Heptathlon score in making her fourth trip to the victory circle.

The US Combined Events Championships in Des Moines is part of the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge**.

For Arnold—who was competing in his fourth ten-eventer in a span of just over six weeks—the second day amounted to a classic showing of determination as he methodically reduced Tom Pappas' lead, winning each of the first four events. He then crushed the Paris World Champion in the final discipline, the 1500 Metres, to take the title with 8215 points. Sitting 178 points away from the lead in fifth place after the first day, Arnold steadily reduced his deficit to 131, 121, 91, and 72 before delivering a knock-out blow at the end.

Fountain, on the other hand, had her competition well in hand throughout the two days. After career-best first-day total from yesterday, the Beijing silver medallist pushed forward and ended with a PB and world-leading 6735.

### **Decathlon**

Arnold set the tone from the day's opening gun with a 14.06 in the 110 Metres Hurdles. Although aided by an excessive wind of 4.4, the time was nevertheless the best of his career and put 967 points in his account to elevate him from fifth to third and bring him to within 131 points of the lead with 5023. Pappas meanwhile struggled to a 14.43 for his slowest decathlon hurdles time in 13 years, despite having that same 4.4 breeze to his back, and his account stood at 5154 after six.

Separating those two was Trinity Otto, who ran a near-PB 14.57 and held second with 5054. Miller Moss (14.56) and Joe Detmer (14.88) were just a breath behind Arnold this point with aggregate scores of 5011 and 5006, respectively.

Arnold's momentum carried into the Discus where his PB 49.14 led the competition. But with Pappas throwing nearly as far (48.63), Arnold was able to gain only ten points on the leader but still managed to move into second, 5996 to 5875. Otto dropped to third with 5690 after a 38.60 toss, as Detmer and Moss exchanged places after flings of 38.41 and 35.62.

Normally a strong pole vaulter, Arnold again bested the field in that event with 5.00, but just as in the discus, Pappas, at 4.90, did not permit his rival any semblance of a quantum leap forward. The gap now stood at 91 (6876 to 6785), as Detmer slid into third at 6457 with a 4.70 jump. Otto's weak 4.30 moved him another spot lower into fourth with 6392 as Moss was clinging to fifth at 6318 after his 4.40.

Arnold was the only competitor surpassing sixty metres in the Javelin at 60.85, and with Pappas throwing 59.64, the top two scores converged even more with a 72-point spread coming from their totals of 7608 and 7536. Detmer solidified his hold on third with 53.94 to amass 7104 while Otto (51.28) and Moss (51.70) held the next two positions at 7000 and 6932.

This set the stage for Arnold's leap to the top, although the 33-degree afternoon temperature did not bode well for fast times. Detmer managed to put any concerns about the climatic conditions out of his mind for just over four minutes, as he produced a brilliant 4:06.63 - the second-best of his career - to win the race by almost a half lap. It ultimately brought him into third place overall but more significantly moved him into the '8000 Club' with a final score of 8009.

But behind Detmer was the duel to decide the title. With roughly a ten-second difference by which he needed to beat Pappas, Arnold stayed near the head of the main pack of runners. As Pappas sank farther back, Arnold (*pictured right*) sailed away to a 4:40.21 time for a final 8215 score. Pappas meanwhile knew the futility of the situation and jogged home in 5:12.01, the slowest 1500 of his career, to end with 8101.

An ecstatic Arnold admitted that "all the work for this win really came before the 1500. I knew I had better skills in the event than Tom did, but I still knew it would be tough." Having to save some strength for a decathlete's least favourite event on such a hot day was a concern at the end. "I live in Tucson [Arizona]. I'm used to the heat, but not this humidity. Here, you are feeling hot even when you're in the shade. The humidity definitely took a toll on me."

Pappas gave an analysis of his past two days. "This is probably the first time I've ever come to a national championships and wasn't ready to compete," he admitted. "I've had some foot injuries so I had not trained on the track all season. This decathlon really wore on me. It would have been nice to win a sixth title." Regarding his diminishing lead throughout the second day, Pappas remarked, "I had a bad hurdle race and it snowballed from there. But I'm happy for Jake. I'm glad that someone with his talent carries himself well and is so humble. He has a good head on his shoulders."



## Heptathlon

The Long Jump found Fountain exceeding the 1100-point event level for the third time, as her 6.79 leap increased her total by 1102 to 5170. Bettie Wade managed 6.21 to strengthen her second-place spot at 4518 while Sharon Day, though jumping a near-PB 5.87, was a distant third with 4409.

After ruling every event, Fountain finally found her match in the Javelin as Emily Pearson threw a PB 47.79 to lead the field. Fountain's 42.26 produced a leading total of 5881 after six events, while Day used a 43.20 fling to moved past Wade into second at 5138 as the latter could manage only 36.63 for a 5121 total.

With a time just under 2:23 needed for a new personal best, Fountain looked up at the blazing sun and gritted her teeth. Two years ago at the 2008 Olympic Trials, a 48.15 javelin throw allowed her to run an leisurely 2:27.69 for her present personal best. This time, it would take considerably more work.

Fountain kept her eye on Ryann Kraiss (2:13.07) running at the front, and she met her goal by more than five seconds with 2:17.80 and a two-day total of 6735.

"I really expected to run a little faster because my training has been going really good," she said at the end. "I had a blister on my foot which was really bad, and I was trying not to limp. I didn't notice it until I started running the 800. It could have been there for a while, but I didn't feel it until I got out onto the hot track." [The temperature of the track was reportedly in excess of 50C on Saturday.]

With no global championship on the schedule this year, Fountain has some once-every-four-years freedom for the rest of the season. "I'm looking forward to going to Europe and competing in some individual events. I want to see what I can do in the hurdles and long jump."

With 2:16.77 in the final event, Day held second at 6006, while Wade's 2:18.44 easily preserved her third position with 5966.

**Ed Gordon for the IAAF**