

Aggies advance 10 more athletes to NCAA Championship field in Eugene

AUSTIN – An Aggie parade of 10 athletes qualified for the NCAA Championship field in Eugene on the second day of the NCAA West preliminary rounds held at Myers Stadium.

Defending NCAA champion Shelbi Vaughan was the first Texas A&M qualifier on Friday as she produced a throw of 199 feet, 11 inches (60.93) to lead the discus field by three-plus feet. Vaughan bettered her NCAA West record mark of 194-0 (59.14) set last year.

As track events began the crew of Aggies joining Vaughan included Deon Lendore and Bralon Taplin in the men's 400, the trio of Aaliyah Brown, Jennifer Madu and Ashton Purvis in the women's 100, Shavez Hart in the 100, Josh Hernandez in the men's 800, and the 400 hurdle tandem of Shamier Little and Gregory Coleman.

Texas A&M now has 13 athletes (seven women, six men) qualified for the NCAA Championships with one more day of qualifying remaining. Jena Hemann is in the NCAA heptathlon field while Dalton Rowan (discus) and Hillary Montgomery (10,000m) advanced on Thursday.

Vaughan opened with a foul in the discus, but took over the lead with a second round toss of 199-11, which is the No. 7 performance on the Aggie all-time list. Wisconsin's Kelsey Card finished second with a 196-6 (59.91) while UTEP's Samantha Hall placed third at 191-11 (58.50).

"I was just trying to get a decent mark to carry me on to the next meet," stated Vaughan. "But getting close to 200 is pretty awesome. It was a really a nice day, the wind was blowing nice and it wasn't too hot.

"I'm excited about defending my title in Eugene, especially with the big PR by Kelsey Card. It's really exciting that I'll have a couple of girls out there that will be able to push me a little further than what I've been pushed in the past. I'm looking forward to a great competition."

Lendore posted the top time among the quarterfinal round of the 400 with a 45.40 over Zack Bilderback of Texas, who finished second to Lendore in 45.91. Taplin was also a heat winner with a 45.96, which was third best time overall, ahead of a 46.04 by DJ Zahn of Illinois.

"Nationals will not be an easy one, there is going to be a lot of great talent there," said Lendore, the defending NCAA champion. "It's all about just keeping my head on and not forgetting that it's my race to lose at the end of the day.

"I was happy to see that slowly but surely Bralon is getting back to where he is supposed to be. We still have a little bit more time before NCAA Championships, so hopefully by then he gets a little better and will be a little more prepared."

Three legs of the Aggie women's 4x100 relay advanced in the 100 meters, with A. Brown and Madu running the same heat and placing second and third with windy times of 11.18 and 11.24 (wind 3.7). Then Purvis posted a wind-aided 11.30 (2.5) as runner-up in her heat. They recorded the 4-5-6 fastest times moving on to Eugene.

"Regionals is all about advancing and getting as many people as we can into nationals," said Madu.

“So, we know if we can handle it in our individual races it will carry over to the relay.”

A. Brown added: “I just wanted to run a smooth race and get to nationals pretty easily. We just want the numbers to add up so when nationals come the points will matter.”

The men’s 100 had Hart placing third with a wind-aided time of 10.15 (2.4 wind) to advance while Devin Jenkins placed eighth in his heat with a windy 10.33 (3.1).

“My main focus was to get through the rounds and finish in the top three,” noted Hart. “I worked on my execution and my push. I had a good reaction, but my drive phase wasn’t as good. I’m learning to stay patient and not get too hyped with others in the same race as me. I wanted to build up a rhythm going into Eugene and this was a nice prep race for nationals.”

In the 800 meters Josh Hernandez led his heat through 400 and 600 meters before Iowa State’s Edward Kemboi took over the lead. Kemboi won the heat in 1:46.23 as J. Hernandez clocked 1:48.14 for third behind a 1:48.12 by USC’s Robert Ford.

“It was hard not having someone to feed off of in the first lap and a half,” explained J. Hernandez. “If I didn’t auto qualify today then I needed to have a fast time. So, I wanted to take the lead to make sure the guys ran fast and help some other guys out.”

Hector Hernandez led his heat through 400 as well, but when the field hit the 600m mark there were five guys in contention for the top three spots that would claim the automatic qualification to the NCAA semifinal.

BYU’s Shaquille Walker won the heat in 1:47.30 with Arizona’s Collins Kibet (1:48.14) and Wyoming’s Harry Fisher (1:48.78) claiming second and third. In fourth place was H. Hernandez with a time of 1:48.98 that left him 0.10 from the last time qualifier.

Defending NCAA champion Little had a challenge from Nnenya Hailey of Arizona in her heat of the 400 hurdles. After clearing the eighth hurdle Little gained a sizeable advantage as she cruised to the finish line and posted the top time of 56.36 with Hailey finishing in 57.60.

“It was a lot better race today, I knew I really had to set up my race regardless if I was tired or not,” noted Little. “I executed over the hurdles and I think I ran a pretty good race. The time wasn’t what it should be, but I’m still proud that I made it to nationals.”

Following Little’s top time were a pair of USC hurdlers in Jaide Stepter (56.76) and Amalie luel (57.33) along with Ariel Jones of Texas (57.48).

Coleman finished in a dead heat for first place in his heat of the 400 hurdles as he ran 50.00 with David Kendziera of Illinois as they both produced the third best time overall. Other heat winners included Michael Stigler of Kansas (48.64) and Jordin Andrade of Boise State (49.67).

“That’s the first time I’ve seen a dead heat,” said Coleman. “I was just trying not to get complacent and still win my heat so I can get a better lane in the next round. This was a great day to only focus on the hurdles.”

In the evening 3,000-meter steeplechase Isaac Spencer placed 11th in his heat with a time of 9:11.15.

First round action in the women's 200 had the Aggies posting the top three times and advancing four to the quarterfinals on Saturday. Kamaria Brown led the way with a windy 22.66 (2.3 wind) as A. Brown clocked 22.91 as runner-up in the same heat. Purvis won another heat in a wind-aided 22.88 (2.9) while Olivia Ekpone finished second in her heat with a 23.50 (2.0).

Hart and Jenkins advanced to the quarterfinal round of the men's 200. Hart won his heat in 20.57 (1.3 wind) while Jenkins finished second in another heat with a 20.95w (2.5 wind).

Field events on Friday featured a career best for Emily Gunderson in the pole vault as she cleared 13-7 (4.14) to tie for 22nd place. Sara Kathryn Stevens made it over 12-7 ¼ (3.83) before missing at 13-1 to finish in a tie for 37th.

The clearance of 13-7 moved Gunderson to No. 2 on the A&M all-time list with the No. 3 performance. The only marks ahead of her are the school record of 13-10 ½ (4.23) and a 13-9 (4.19) both set by Laura Asimakis in 2011. Gunderson had three attempts at 13-11 (4.24) to remain in the competition but missed.

"It was a lot of fun today, I came in confident and practice had been going good," noted Gunderson. "Setting a PR this late in the season felt good. I've competed on this track a lot and always have good results here."

Austin Cook threw the hammer 196-9 (59.98) to place 29th as Jeff Bartlett had a 51-8 ¼ (15.75) in the shot put to finish 46th. Hemann cleared 5-8 to place in a tie for 25th in the high jump.