

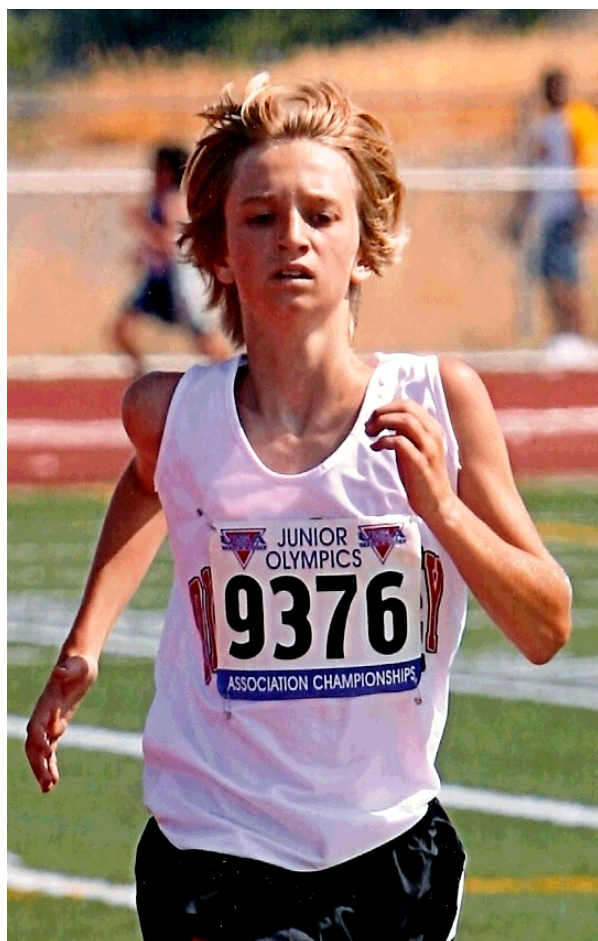
Athlete Profile

Tyler Sorensen

By Jack Salisbury

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The men lined up for the race, many of them middle-aged but, also, very experienced at their sport. Sweat was dripping off their shoulders even before the race started. It was April 29, 2007. The race was the Pacific Association/USATF 5K Race Walk in Santa Cruz—a highly competitive event on the PA/USATF Race Walking Grand Prix that also served as USATF’s Western Regional 5K Championship.



In between all the grown and experienced men stood **Tyler Sorensen**. Sorensen’s entry in the race wasn’t all that notable, unless you consider that he was a third of the age of many of his competitors.

The 13-year-old wasn’t rattled by his elders, though. Sorensen, defeating men that could easily be his father and maybe even his grandfather, won the race in 27 minutes, 48 seconds. It was the most memorable moment of his young race-walking career.

“I beat all the adults and it felt pretty awesome,” the fast teenager sheepishly said.

Although he’s not even in high school yet, Sorensen already holds a wealth of notches in his belt.

Last year, he won the Midget Boys 1,500 Meter Race Walk at the USATF National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships by 17 seconds, clocking in with a time of 8:03.63. He also has the honor of holding both national and

PA/USATF records. Sorensen currently holds the PA/USATF Youth Boys 3,000 Meter Race Walk record (15:01.04), which he set earlier this season. He has the AAU national record for Sub-Youth Boys in the 3,000 Meter Race Walk, too.

Race walking is an obscure sport, even to many casual track and field fans, but the rules are fairly simple. The main rule is that a race walker can never be airborne the way that runners are in full stride.

Sorensen gave his best description of what it means to race walk.

“Your hips pop out so you can get faster turnover and push yourself farther,” he explained. “You get the hips going. It looks pretty smooth during a race. It looks pretty cool.”

Both Sorensen, and his sister Nicolette, age 11, excel at the sport, although she was the one who originally got him into it.

“I’ve been running track and cross country since I was nine years old,” he said. “I decided to try race walking after Nicolette won the National Junior Olympics Race Walk as a Bantam in 2005. I never thought it would be something that I’m doing, but now I really like it.”

Race walking doesn’t get as much attention as a lot of other track and field events, but its base has been expanding in recent years. It was first introduced into the Olympic Games in 1908 (in 1992 for women), and was even featured in an episode of the Fox Television comedy *Malcolm In The Middle*.

“We haven’t received as much attention for youth race walking as we would have liked,” PA/USATF’s Youth Race Walk Chair Becky Klein said. “The interest in race walking has grown, though. [In particular] Ujoma Track Club has stepped up with a lot of participants.

“I expect us (PA/USATF) to send quite a few kids to the USATF Junior Olympics National Championships,” she said. “I expect us to walk away with three or four [race walk] medals. That’s a lot.”

While discussing Sorensen’s chances at the Junior Olympics Championship (which will be held July 24-29 at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, Calif.), Klein said: “He will probably medal again.”

As one of the top youth race walkers in the country, Sorensen commented about what he thinks the future of the event holds.

“I think there are a lot of opportunities for the sport to continue growing in popularity in track and field,” he said. “Race walking is not just about speed. It’s also about technique and improving your form while staying legal, so it’s always challenging. There is always something to work on to improve.

“I think that it would be pretty cool [for me]to help it and expand everything,” he added.

Although Sorensen first started his track career as a distance runner, he enjoys the mental and physical challenge that race walking provides.

“I like it because you get to work on your form,” he said. “You get to practice everything and get better. You always get to think about it and do better. I think it’s a pretty cool sport.”

Sorensen, who resides in Lafayette, Calif., fills much of his time outside of race walking with other sports activities and school work.

“I like biking and swimming for fun,” he said. “My favorite school subjects are math and science and I was recently elected school treasurer. I’m very involved in Boy Scouts and I’m working to achieve the Eagle rank by my sophomore year in high school. I also like to relax and play rock music on my electric guitar.”

As a whole, the 13-year-old carries himself modestly. Whether it’s beating people three times his age, or working toward his rank of Eagle Scout, Tyler Sorensen knows the formula for excellence.