

Athlete Profile
Jamesha Youngblood

By Nicole Moreno

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Recent Hercules High School graduate **Jamesha Youngblood** (San Pablo, Calif.) is already making a name for herself in the sport of track and field. Indeed, the 18-year-old jumper and hurdler has had a superb outdoor campaign in 2007. Perhaps, the biggest win to date for the young athlete came at this summer's Pan American Junior Athletics Championships in Brazil. In a top international field of young athletes, Youngblood won the women's long jump with a mark



Doug Speck Photo / DyeStat

of 6.40 meters/21 feet 0 inches.

Youngblood followed that big win with another. She captured the young women's division long jump at the 2007 USATF National Junior Olympic Track and Field Championships in late July with a jump of 5.90m/19-4.25.

Her accomplishments do not end there. Youngblood is the current 2007 USA Junior Champion in the women's long jump. She earned that title at the Finish Line USA Junior Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Indianapolis last June with a leap of 6.31m/20-8.5. The win, recorded in less than ideal conditions, qualified her for the Pan American Junior Championships.

“One minute the wind was kind of strong, then another minute you didn't feel it at all,” Youngblood said about Junior Nationals. “It made getting on the board tough because one minute I'd be on the board, another in front and another behind, but I just had to keep adjusting.”

Youngblood also had a superb year in high school competition. At the California Interscholastic Federation State Track and Field championships on June 2, she won the girls long jump (20-11.75, wind aided) and 300 meter low hurdles (41.08 seconds). She ranked second in

the nation, and broke region records, in both events. Youngblood also placed third in the triple jump at that meet.

On top of these achievements, the teenager led the region in the 100m high hurdles (14.44 seconds). She was also ranked in the top ten in the 100m and 200m dashes.

When she attended the Sacramento Meet of Champions on April 28, Youngblood initially broke the region record while winning the long jump with a leap of 20-6, putting her on top of the nation's seasonal charts. Another fine moment came at the North Coast Section Meet of Champions on May 26. Youngblood took the national lead in the 300 hurdles with a time of 41.23. Last March, Youngblood's performance at the Nike Indoor Nationals predicted a great year. She competed as an individual, and won the long jump and triple jump.

Youngblood was recently named the *Contra Costa Times* Female Athlete of the Year. She is leaving high school as a two-time state high school champion. She is also the first athlete in state history to win high school state titles in both the 300-meter hurdles and long jump. Overall, 2007 has been Youngblood's most rewarding year.

In high school, Youngblood's prolific track and field activity helped to teach her the importance of time management.

"It was very hard," Youngblood admitted. "You're always trying to get good grades and you have no free time. But, with dedication it can work."

In the fall, Youngblood will leave her AC Track Club behind and attend the University of Oregon. She also considered Cal and UCLA. She decided upon the University of Oregon because she likes the team and they have a jumping coach (Robert Johnson).

Josh Tezeno, Youngblood's coach at Hercules High School, receives high praise from the young standout. He also coached her during her younger running days with the Flying Jaguars. Youngblood decided to attend Hercules High School because Tezeno coached there. This year, Tezeno earned honors as the *Contra Costa Times* Girls Track Coach of the Year.

Youngblood has not always been excited about running. When she was 8 years old, she was bribed by her mother to run.

"She loves salads, so I would promise her a salad from McDonald's if she ran," said her mother, Linda Youngblood.

Youngblood, in her defense, said she was just a typical 8-year-old.

"I just didn't know that much about [track and field], and never played any sport before. I was always in the house, but after I went to practices I began to like it," said Youngblood.

Linda Youngblood quickly noticed her daughter's extraordinary athletic abilities. She simply could not catch up with her daughter. Linda Youngblood still supports her daughter, and has attended every one of her track meets.

“I think she can go as far as she wants if she stays focused. The sky is the limit for her,” said Linda Youngblood.

Soon to be a collegian, Youngblood still has plenty of athletics left. Track and field—leaping long distances, and sprinting fast over hurdles—is her dream job.

“I see it as a career. I hope to go as far as my body can go,” said Youngblood.

Surely, Jamesha Youngblood, one of Pacific Association/USATF’s fastest rising stars, has many tracks etched in her promising future.