

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT**

- (1) Palo Alto Lightning Track & Field Club coach Willie Young in the middle of some of his young runners.
- (2) Meskerem Baikie was undefeated prior to the Jr. Olympics.
- (3) Kyra Pretre.



Photos courtesy of Palo Alto Lightning Club

# Lightning-fast kids reach Jr. Olympics

■ Cross country nationals held in New Mexico

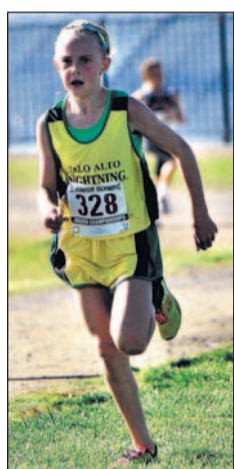
From Daily News Dispatches

Roughly two weeks ago in Albuquerque, N.M., nine members of the Palo Alto Lightning Track & Field Club competed in the USATF National Junior Olympic Cross Country Championships. The list of athletes included four boys and five girls:

- Julian Montoya (ages 7-8), 2,000 meters (Menlo Park).
- Karim Nasr (7-8), 2,000 (Atherton);
- Deven Shah (7-8), 2,000 (Los Altos Hills);
- Alex Selwyn (9-10), 3,000 (Palo Alto);
- Meskerem Baikie (7-8), 2,000 (Mountain View);
- Shoshona Gevelber (7-8), 2,000 (Palo Alto);
- Joyce Yang (7-8), 2,000 (Sunnyvale);
- Kyra Pretre (9-10), 3,000 (Woodside);
- Amelia Vinton (9-10) 3,000 (Palo Alto).

Altitude above 5,000 feet altitude may have been a factor for some athletes, but Montoya kept on trucking — finishing 25th to earn All-America status along with Baikie, a first-year competitor who had previously won eight straight races in the regular season. Baikie finished 35th.

Palo Alto Lightning had seven award winners at the Pacific Association Junior Olympics in Folsom on Nov. 18 — Baikie, Gevelber, Montoya, Nasr, Vinton, Selwyn and Kristen Cheung (BG, 9-10). The region championships, which took place Nov. 25, were also held in Folsom.



## JOHNSON

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“Those kids can end up being better than a lot of those five-star players,” Baer said. “He can play for anybody — that’s how good he is.”

These are great days for the 21-year-old San Jose native. He will marry his high school sweetheart, Hannah Denecour, on April 13. He is on schedule to graduate with a degree in kinesiology a month later. In the meantime, he hopes his name will be called in the NFL draft, April 25-27.

“Just give me a try,” he said. That’s what Johnson wanted from college recruiters four years ago, but few came calling. At The King’s Academy, a private school in Sunnyvale with 600 high school students, Johnson dominated.

“He had a crazy amount of sacks, an absurd number,” recalled Brent Brennan, then SJSU’s recruiting coordinator and now an assistant coach at Oregon State.

The total was 38 over his final two seasons.

But only San Jose State, UC Davis and Sacramento State made offers.

“It was his size,” said Ron Kellner, TKA’s football coach at the time. “It was hard for them to understand ... ‘Are you sure you’re a defensive end?’”

What the Spartans saw was a smart, driven, versatile player whose potential exceeded his measurables. Asked what he would have told the recruiters who overlooked him, Johnson said: “That I would do anything they asked me to do. That I’m a worker.”

He could already bench press 385 pounds and run a six-minute mile, Kellner said. And he played running back, rushing for more than 600 yards.

“He had the ability to change direction — that’s really what it was for us,” Brennan said. “It’s awesome to see what a great player he’s become.”

Johnson grew to 6-2, 245 pounds and improved each season.

He talks about sacking a quarterback the way a power hitter describes hitting a home run.

“It’s the best feeling you can ever have,” said Johnson, whose 12 sacks this season are just one fewer than the national leader.

Baer said Johnson has meshed natural ability with a willingness to learn his craft:

“He’s got a feel for it ... a knack. Understands leverage. Great get-off first step. Uses his hands extremely well.”

He’s also benefited from being coached by two former NFL stars — in 2010 by ex-49er Bryant Young and the past two seasons by former Dallas Cowboy Jim Jeffcoat. In 29 NFL seasons, those two combined for 192 sacks.

Jeffcoat said Johnson is an underrated athlete with a great understanding of the game. He believes Johnson can once more overcome the doubters and play in the NFL, perhaps as an outside linebacker.

His best attribute as a pass rusher? “His flexibility. When you’re rushing quarterbacks, you’re always on angles,” Jeffcoat said. “It’s leverage. It’s not size, it’s not speed. Pass rushers come in different sizes and different shapes, but the effective ones have the same flexibility and can turn corners, and he does a tremendous job of that.”

Johnson said he’s not surprised by his achievements because he expected to work harder than the next guy. But he knows he wasn’t a sure thing, so success is satisfying.

“It’s exciting,” Johnson said, “that the unknown was able to be achieved.”



Rachel Altmaier / Daily News  
Travis Johnson as a fullback during his days at TKA.

## PREP RESULTS

### SATURDAY GIRLS BASKETBALL

■ **Notre Dame-Belmont 41, Carmont-Belmont 33 (OT):** The Tigers outscored the Scots 10-2 in the overtime period to win the battle of Belmont. Eleni Giotinis tallied 14 points, garnered 9 rebounds for the Tigers, while Justine DeLeon added 10 points. Record: ND 2-4

■ **Menlo School-Atherton 65, San Marcos 19:** The Knights poured in 31 points in the first quarter on their way to capturing the Santa Barbara Tournament of Champions. Drew Edelman had 20 points for the Knights, while Hannah Paye scored 14 points for Menlo. Paye, Edelman and Maddy Price were all-tourney selections for the Knights. Kaelen Dunn and McKenzie Duffner had 10 points each for the Knights. Record: MS 5-3

■ **Los Altos 51, Lincoln-San Jose 31:** The Eagles handled the Lions in the Hunt Memorial Classic at Evergreen Valley-San Jose. Meghan McDermott had 20 points to lead the Eagles.

### BOYS BASKETBALL

■ **Menlo School-Atherton 61, Mission-San Francisco 59:** Bobby Roth scored 19 points for Menlo, contributing 4 rebounds and 3 steals. The Knights’ Jack Heneghan scored 18 points, grabbing 5 rebounds and notching 4 steals. Menlo’s Liam Dunn had 10 points and 5 rebounds. Menlo’s Ryan Young finished with 9 points, 13 rebounds and 5 assists. A basket

by Heneghan with 50 seconds left pulled the Knights within 3 points. Roth raced was fouled as he made a layup, plus the free throw to tie the game at 59-59. Heneghan put the game away on the next play, scoring inside for a 61-59 lead. Record: MS 3-3

■ **St. Patrick/St. Vincent 73, Sacred Heart Prep-Atherton 54:** The Gators were outscored 41-21 in the first half in a Catholic Schools Classic game at Cal State-East Bay. Ricky Galliani led SHP with 21 points, hitting 4 3-pointers. Records: SHP 2-4; SP/SV 6-4

■ **St. Mary’s-Stockton 65, St. Francis-Mountain View 52:** The Lancers fell to the Rams in the Catholic Schools Catholic at Cal State-East Bay.

■ **Serra-San Mateo 63, St. Joseph Notre Dame-Alameda 46:** Jacqui Biggins stayed hot for the Padres with 21 points, hitting 3 treys. Serra’s Henry Caruso tallied 18 points. Record: S 6-1

### FRIDAY BOYS SOCCER

■ **Mountain View 3, Mills-Millbrae 0:** Keenan Zucker scored for the Spartans, who had 2 goals by Brad Bumgarner. The Spartans recorded their sixth shutout in seven games. Record: MV 6-0-1

## GIRLS SOCCER

■ **Mountain View 4, Woodside Priory-Portola Valley 0:** Morgan Mathews and Alicia De Gues each had 2 goals to lead the Spartans on a rainy Friday night at the Burlingame Winter Tournament. With the win, Mountain View won its bracket of the tournament. Erica Higa, Allie Gamble, and Danna Weintraub were terrific from their center-mids positions for the Spartans, dictating the flow of the game. Neha Cheemalavagu and Laura Reynolds anchored the Spartans’ defense. Record: MV 7-1

## GIRLS BASKETBALL

■ **Gunn-Palo Alto 60, Lincoln-San Jose 37:** Zoe Zwierling had 20 points, 7 rebounds and 4 steals for the Titans in the McNair Tournament. Gunn’s Claire Klausner had 10 points, while Titans center Meghan Mahoney had 9 boards, a steal and a block. The Titans dominated Lincoln on the boards, 41-22. Record: G 7-2

■ **Sacred Heart Prep-Atherton 41, Mercy-Burlingame 32:** The Gators outscored the Crusaders 24-4 in the second and third quarters combined to win a nonleague affair. Sisters Meghan and Melissa Holland had 11 points each for the Gators. Record: SHP 8-1

■ **Menlo School-Atherton 61, Palmdale 24:** Menlo jumped out to a 16-5 first-period lead and never looked back in a Santa Barbara Tournament of Champions game. Menlo had 3 players in double figures — Drew Edelman with 22, Olivia Pelarin with 15 and Hannah Paye with 10. Record: MS 4-3

## STANFORD

From page B1

a win here at Tennessee, so I wanted to one-up her,” Ogwumike said. “It was a great game.”

Tennessee coach Holly Warlick questioned her team’s effort after the game and was more disappointed in this performance than she was after a 76-53 loss at No. 3 Baylor on Tuesday.

“This will change,” Warlick said. “As coaches, we’ll make some changes too. It’s time to grow up.”

Bashaara Graves had 15 points and 12 rebounds for Tennessee (7-3). Meighan Simmons added 12 points, while Ariel Massengale and Cierra Burdick had 11 points each.

Stanford’s Amber Orrange scored 14 points. Toni Kokenis and Bonnie Samuelson each added 11 points and Joslyn Tinkle had 10 points for the Cardinal, who host No. 2 Connecticut in their next game Dec. 29.

“The most important thing now is that we keep improving and stay healthy,” Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer said. “We’ve got great leadership and great chemistry. I’m hoping that we’ll be playing better in March and April.”

Tennessee was seeking its first home win over a top-ranked opponent since a 77-72 victory over Louisiana Tech on Jan. 22, 1996. The Lady Vols are 14-32 against top-ranked opponents, and they’re 2-11 when facing No. 1 teams at home.

Stanford (11-0) was coming off a 53-49 squeaker at No. 21 South Carolina on Wednesday, but the Cardinal never trailed Tennessee and owned a double-digit lead most of the way.

Facing a national title contender for the second straight game, the Lady Vols again struggled to make shots.

Tennessee missed its first 11 shots against Baylor to fall behind 17-0 and went on to trail 41-16 at the intermission, its largest halftime deficit in school history.

The Lady Vols shot 31.9 percent against Stanford and missed their first 12 attempts from 3-point range.

Stanford grabbed a 33-21 halftime lead by relying on Ogwumike and capitalizing on Tennessee’s cold shooting.

Ogwumike, who entered the game averaging 21.9 points and 12.2 rebounds, had 13 points and 12 rebounds by halftime.

The 6-foot-4 junior finished the game with a career-high five assists to go along with her eighth consecutive double-double.

“The most important thing was that she didn’t get in foul trouble,” VanDerveer said. “It was disciplined basketball. She does everything for us. She’s a leader. She puts the team on her back. She made her big sister Nneka proud today.”

After a Burdick jumper tied the score 8-8 with 14:44 left in the first half, Stanford went on a 13-2 run. Tennessee missed 12 consecutive shots at one point during that Stanford run.

“We let our offense dictate our defense,” Burdick said. “I feel like I’m a broken record because I said the same exact thing against Baylor. You would think we would have gone back to the drawing



Wade Payne / Associated Press

Stanford guard Toni Kokenis (31) drives against Tennessee guard Kamiko Williams (4) in the first half. Kokenis scored 11 points in the Cardinal’s victory.

board and fixed that, but apparently we haven’t. That’s what hurts so bad. We had a great opportunity in front of us to beat the No. 1 team in our house and we just couldn’t get the job done.”

Tennessee cut the lead to 10 early in the second half, but Stanford answered with an 11-2 run.

The Lady Vols chipped away at the 19-point deficit and got the lead down to nine when Burdick made one of two free throws with 8:43 left. Ogwumike answered with a putback on Stanford’s next possession, and the margin didn’t drop below 10 points again.

Even though Tennessee’s offense improved in the second half, the Lady Vols couldn’t make enough stops to have a realistic shot at pulling the upset.

“We would make a stop, then give up an offensive rebound,” Warlick said. “If you can’t do those things, then you had better hope you’re going to shoot in the 50s or 60s (or) you’re not going to win the basketball game. This program was built on defense and rebounding, and that is not a typical Tennessee team right there. That’s not going to get it done. That’s not acceptable, and I’ll take responsibility for that. They will be ready.”

While Tennessee searches for answers, Stanford continues playing with the sense of purpose that accompanies a No. 1 ranking. Stanford’s 71-69 victory over defending national champion Baylor on Nov. 16 has helped the Cardinal believe it’s capable of anything.

“It gave us a lot of confidence,” Ogwumike said. “This year, we lost my sister Nneka. The people outside and inside the team doubted how well we’d do this year.”

Ogwumike was named the Pac-12 women’s player of the week for the third time this season and sixth time overall. She is just three back of all-time Stanford and Pac-12 leaders Candice Wiggins and Jayne Appel. Ogwumike averaged 21.0 points and 17.0 in two games last week.

Stanford remains No. 1 in The Associated Press women’s basketball poll for the sixth consecutive week, matching the team’s longest run in the top spot.

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