

Track and field: ABQ miler Valle fights through pain to win national title

By Pat Newell/For the Journal

Saturday, February 18th, 2017 at 8:44pm



Albuquerque Academy teacher Lisa Valle, 50, works her way through the pack on the way to victory in the women's 50-54 age-group mile. (Jim Thompson/Albuquerque Journal)

When Albuquerque Academy teacher Lisa Valle returns to school next week, she'll carry with her the moniker, "national champion."

Valle is one of 636 competitors at the Albuquerque Convention Center this weekend for the USA Track and Field Masters Indoor Championships. Valle, a decorated masters champion the past eight years, captured the women's

50-54 one-mile run by putting together a terrific final 200 meters to overtake Katherine Wolski of the SoCal Track Club.

“I knew I could get (Wolski). It was just matter if I wanted to, and to put myself in a little more pain,” Valle said.

Wolski grabbed the lead in the first 50 meters of the race, and held the advantage until the halfway point of the final lap.

With 400 meters to go, Valle decided to endure the pain of making up a 25-meter disadvantage running her two fastest splits over the final two laps.



Orville Rogers, 99, finds the finish line to win the men’s over-90 60-meter dash. Rogers beat out Dixon Hempill, 92. (Jim Thompson/Journal)

She finished in 5 minutes, 40.61 seconds.

“I was kind of saving it, but I went out too slow,” Valle said. “I thought that if I didn’t have to run hard today and could still win it, I was going to do that.”

The competitor in Valle prevailed, and she adjusted to Wolski’s steady, fast pace.

“I just decided to do it, and I know how strong I feel from years of racing,” Valle said.

Valle grew up in Alamogordo and was identified as a talented distance runner following a required physical education class 600-meter run.

She parlayed her distance-running skill into a standout collegiate running career. She started at Idaho State, then transferred in 1985 to the University of New Mexico where she completed her final three years of eligibility.

Valle has competed regularly since her graduation from college, and started her masters career in 2008. Before this weekend, she racked up four indoor track gold medals and seven outdoor gold medals including the trifecta in 2009 in Lahti, Finland — winning gold medals at the World Masters Athletics Championship in the 800 meters, 1,500 meters and 2,000-meter steeplechase.

Valle, 50, is embarking on a new age group, and although she admits she is completely unfamiliar with the competition, she is encouraged by the early results.

“I don’t know this age group, and I didn’t know these people from today’s race,” Valle said. “I didn’t know the girl that was in front of me. It could have been anyone, but I’m learning the people.”

And Valle is learning fast.

Saturday’s notebook

Kathy Martin, Northport, N.Y., coming off a record-breaking performance in the 3,000 meters Friday, set a new masters world record in the 65-69 women’s mile with a timing 6:01.46.

“I wasn’t sure what I would do at altitude,” Martin said. “I had my sights on this one, and you hope for the best.”

Meet officials counted four world and four U.S. records set Saturday.

In a photo finish, Orville Rogers, 99, of Houston, Texas edged Dixon Hemphill, 92, of Fairfax Station, Va. by five-hundredths of a second in the 60-meter dash. The two oldest male competitors finished in 18.00 and 18.05 seconds respectively.

“The thrill of winning and setting world records,” Rogers said explaining why he continues to compete at an advanced age.

Other record-breakers from Saturday included Karl Smith (Alexandria, Va.) in the men’s 55-59 60-meter hurdles. The 1984 Jamaican Olympian won in world-record 8.56 seconds. Antonio Palacios (Bloomington, Ind.) won the men’s 50-54 long jump with an American-record leap of 6.5 meters (21 feet, 3¼ inches. Monica Kendall (Portland, Ore.) captured the 60-64 women’s shot put with an American-record throw of 12.06 meters (39 feet, 7 inches).

Two records in the 4x200m relay closed out the day’s events. Athena Track Club set a new American record in the W55 in 2:03.02. In the M35, Southwest Sprinters Track Club tied the world record in 1:29.74.

It was an inauspicious start to multiple-time world champion Rachel Guest’s weekend. The Surprise, Ariz., native spent Thursday evening in an urgent care facility in Albuquerque. Friday, she captured the women’s pentathlon. Saturday, she blitzed the field in the women’s 40-44 60-meter hurdles, winning in 9.16 seconds. “I would have liked to see a sub 9 (seconds),” Guest said. “But I’m here, and I was going to make the best of it.”

Retired NFL receiver Phil McConkey, placed second in the men’s 55-59 60-meter dash with a time of 7.96 seconds. A member of the New York Giants’ Super Bowl-winning team from the 1986 season, McConkey turns 60 next week. “I felt butterflies (before Saturday’s final),” McConkey said. “It’s the fountain of youth.”

Noted jazz musician Nolan Shaheed continued his dominance in the distance events. Shaheed won the 65-69 men’s mile in 5:45.81.