

# Never too old to compete: Baton Rouge hosts 50th annual USA Track and Field Masters outdoor national championships

BY MIKE GEGENHEIMER | SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE JUL 12, 2017 - 3:27 PM

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If there's one thing organizers at the USA Track and Field Masters outdoor national championships want people to know, it's that you're never too old to go for a run.

Starting Thursday, LSU's Bernie Moore Stadium will host more than 900 athletes from around the country who hope to prove that maxim as they compete for national titles for anyone over the age of 30. And when organizers say anyone can compete, they mean anyone.

From former national champions and Olympians — 40 to be exact — to those 90 and older, the Masters meet is a place for everyone to show they still have a little gas left in the tank.

"We do have some of the best athletes in the world, but we have everybody else also," said USA Track & Field masters media director Bob Weiner. "That's the point: Fitness and health and training and competition is for everyone, and it's open to everyone."

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the meet's first event, held in San Diego. Baton Rouge, in partnership with SportsBR, won this year's bid about two years ago, beating out dozens of other applicants.

While athletes from all over the country are welcome, the event does feature several from Baton Rouge.

Julia Hawkins, a 101-year-old sprinter known as "Hurricane," will look to defend her title as the world record holder (among women 100 and older) in the 100-meter dash. She set her mark of 39.62 seconds at this year's National Senior Games in Birmingham, Alabama.

Mary Norckauer, 92, is a local who is expected to compete in 12 events: the 100-, 200-, 400-, 800- and 1,500-meter events on the track, as well as the long jump, triple jump, shot put, discus, hammer, weight and javelin throws in the field.

While he doesn't hail from Baton Rouge anymore, 71-year-old Delmon McNabb won't feel too out of place this weekend when he returns to LSU, where he was a javelin star in the 1960s. He's the only Tiger to claim a national title in the event, which he won in 1967.

Competitors did not have to qualify for the meet, but they are seeded according to their submitted results and age groups.

"We've got top-level people and everyday Joe and Marys," Weiner said. "We have 40 reigning world champions, a dozen recent world record holders over the last three years, 87 defending national champions and many are from Baton Rouge and Louisiana."

Weiner noted that most of the organizers are competitors, too. Weiner, 70, is competing in the steeplechase and the 1,500-meter run.

That's part of their commitment to the event: Organizers want people to know they can improve their lives through exercise and that no one is too old to compete.

"With a regular fitness program — every other day for a half-hour a day — the study the Washington Post did said you gain nine years on your life. And with a more intense program, you gain more years on your life," Weiner said. "The number I use is that you gain 10 years on your life with a serious fitness program like we have in Masters track and field. It's not just for the world-class people; it's for everybody."

The meet begins at 8 a.m. Thursday and ends Sunday night. Spectators are admitted free.