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At 92 years old, Baton Rouge's Mary Norckauer is still as competitive as ever

BY MIKE GEGENHEIMER | SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE JUL 13, 2017 - 5:25 PM

Mike Gegenheimer

Only a few minutes after running the 800 meters Thursday, 92-year-old Mary Norckauer was still bouncing around to avoid a buildup of lactic acid in her legs when someone came by to let her know she finished in 7 minutes, 31.36 seconds.

She immediately let out a frustrated sigh. That time is about 33 seconds shy of the world record she had set out to break.

"I could've done that," she said.

There's nothing Norckauer takes more seriously than competition.

When a big event is coming up, the Baton Rouge resident spends weeks getting her body prepared, whether it be tweaking her diet and sleep patterns, training or making doctor visits.

She reads books on the latest techniques and seeks out professional advice on everything down to the thickness of the socks she should wear. She carefully monitors her diet right down to what times she should eat.

Norckauer isn't at the USA Track and Field Masters national outdoor championships this weekend to get some light exercise or to stay in shape. She's here to set records — world records.

"I'm one to dangle the carrot, and I'm going to work," Norckauer said. "When I turned 90, that's when I got back into (competing) seriously. There weren't that many competitors, and now is my chance to set American and world records, which I did: eight American records and three world records when I turned 90."

Norckauer is practically a celebrity as she walks around Bernie Moore Track Stadium, site of this year's national championships for athletes 35 years or older. Strangers from around the country go out of their way to talk to her or ask for pictures.

She's well known around the senior track circuit after more than 30 years in competitive track and field, and for good reason. Norckauer holds world records in four sports: pistol shooting, throws pentathlon, indoor rowing and cross country. She would also hold several outdoor track records if it weren't for mistakes by organizers in the past that negated her times — which continues to nag at her.

Now, whenever she starts an event, she calls out to the officials to make sure the right timers and measurement equipment are used for her effort to be officially recorded. Many times, she knows the rules and regulations better than meet organizers.

She's competitive, because it's the only life she's ever known.

In her younger days, Norckauer was a professional ice skater, dancer, a baseball player, a competitive shooter (she was on U.S. pistol team) and archer. If there's a competition for it, it's likely Norckauer has tried it.

"People say, 'At your age, you're still doing that?'" she said. "Why not? Until something happens and I can't do it. I have to accept the fact my times are slower and my distances are shorter, but that's to be expected."

For a while, Norckauer liked to add a new event to her regimen every year but, as she puts it, there's no more events to add.

This weekend, Norckauer will compete in 11 events. Seven athletes are entered in more, but most are much younger. The next closest is an 83-year-old man from Wisconsin.

Norckauer was scheduled to compete in 12 events this weekend, but a car accident injured her shoulder to where she was unable to do the hammer toss Thursday. She said she'll still compete in all of the other events: the 100, 200, 400, 800 and 1,500 meters along with the discus, javelin, weight throw, shot put and long and triple jumps.

"The runs are the hardest. That takes the most preparation," Norckauer said. "The throws, you have to know the technique. I don't know that I have a favorite. I enjoy them all."