

After pro career, former Olympian Walter Dix continues his love of track at Masters Championship

BY MIKE GEGENHEIMER | SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE JUL 14, 2017 - 3:55 PM

Mike Gegenheimer

Walter Dix gave a wave to the crowd as the PA system at the Bernie Moore Track Stadium listed his long résumé of accomplishments. The small crowd responded with a round of applause for the man who is one of the more successful former athletes competing on LSU's campus this weekend.

Dix won two bronze medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympics for team USA, the only U.S. track athlete to win multiple medals in the games. He owns three gold medals in the USA Outdoor Championships. At Florida State, Dix was an outdoor national champion in the 100 meters.

He's raced against the best in the world, including Usain Bolt and Tyson Gay.

But on Friday, Dix began a different chapter of his career, when he ran in the 100-meter dash prelims at the USA Track and Field Masters Championship, an event that allows athletes 30 years and older, amateur and former professionals, to compete for the rest of their lives. There is no qualifying standards to enter.

It was the first time Dix competed in such an event, and while there was no threat of broken records or Olympic golds on the line and his competition wasn't the world-class athletes he was used to, it still gave him the same rush and excitement he's felt his whole career.

For Dix, Friday was about nothing more than the love of the sport.

"I love track and field. It's a part of me," Dix said. "This is just something I always want to be a part of. This is here for people who love track and field. At 31 years old, why would I not run this race?"

Dix posted a time of 10.32 seconds in the 100-meter prelims Friday, far ahead of his next closest competitor. Lawrence Trice Jr. finished second with a time of 10.70.

Dix's career best — 9.88 seconds — came in 2010. Only 24 sprinters, eight of which are Americans, have ever run a faster time.

At the Beijing Olympics, he ran a time 9.91 seconds, finishing third behind Bolt and Richard Thompson of Trinidad and Tobago.

"(Beijing) was definitely a life-opening experience to get to compete for your country," Dix said. "It's definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I'm glad I was able to do it."

His best event, though, is the 200 meters, where he set a personal best of 19.53 seconds in 2011, making him the fourth fastest man in the event. He also finished third behind Bolt in the Olympics in the 200 meters.

Dix is scheduled to compete in the 200 meters at the Masters Championship with the prelims Saturday and the final Sunday at 11:03 a.m. The finals of the 100-meter dash will be at 1:30 p.m. Saturday.

"It was fun," Dix said. "You can only stay at that level for so long. You try to make it last as long as you can and then you have to continue to come down and continue being a great American and live your life."

Dix said he's had a wonderful experience in Baton Rouge getting to know other people from around the country who are as passionate as he is about the sport.

And even if there aren't many who can push him in a race the way he has been in the past, it's nice to see the same drive and determination Olympic athletes show.

"They take it just as serious as the Olympic athletes," Dix said. "You see some of the competitors here, and the fun they're having is just like Olympic athletes. There's no difference except for maybe the age and the level. As far as human beings competition, it's all the same."