

2016 AWARD WINNERS

FEMALE YOUTH ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Rising to Challenge

Last year Jayla Ellis had a dominant track & field season. She was a multiple-event, Association and Regional Champion and performed well at the 2015 USATF National Junior Olympics earning All-American honors in the pentathlon, 100mH and long jump. In 2016, Ellis entered the 15-16 age division which presented a new set of challenges. She would compete as one of the younger athletes in the division and have the opportunity to participate some high profile, national events where her abilities and resolve would truly be tested.

Ellis had a busy 2016 competition year. Success came early with a 1st place finish in the long jump at the 2016 USATF Hershey Youth Indoor Championships in Staten Island, New York. In the same meet she participated in the 55mH and 400m with 2nd and 9th place finishes. In May, Ellis earned a 5th place finish in the 100m H and 12th in the long jump at the Class AAA PIAA Track & Field Championships. She traveled to North Carolina for the New Balance Outdoor Nationals and participated in the freshman long jump and Emerging Elite 100mH placing 5th and 7th respectively. Ellis finished her outdoor competition at the 2016 USATF Hershey Outdoor Championships competing in the heptathlon (2nd) and long jump (4th).

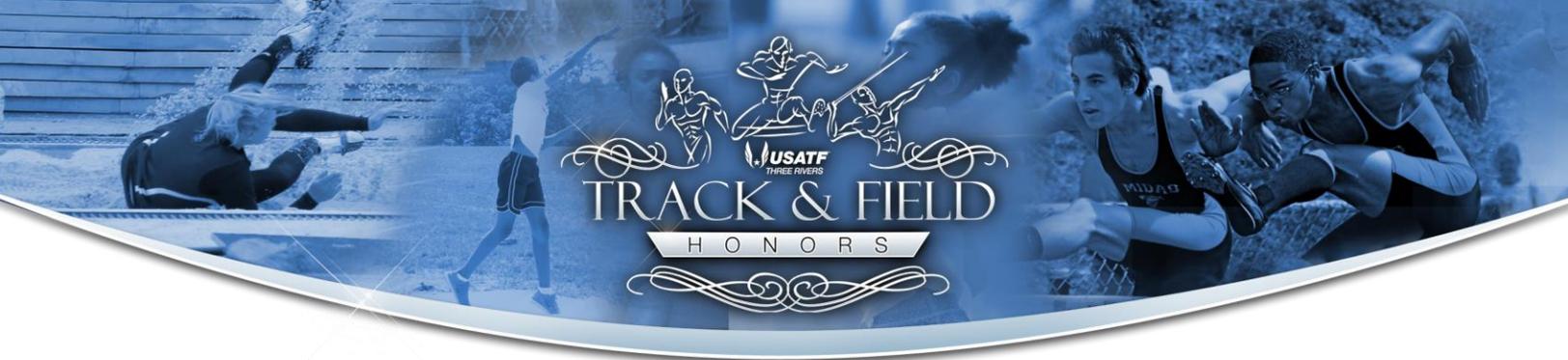


Mary Ann Magnant

This fall, Ellis started her sophomore year of high school and is embracing the new year of change. In fact, she is now attending a new high school, Oakland Catholic. Maintaining good grades continues to be a top priority. Ellis continues to work with the Midas Track club and is still rowing for cross training. She is focusing on technique and has increased workout intensity. She recently placed 3rd in the Head of Ohio Regatta and plans to compete in the state of Ohio later this fall.

When asked about winning the award for the 2nd year in the row Ellis explained that she was truly honored. On paper, it wasn't her most successful year, but she rose to the challenge and wasn't afraid to compete against some of the best. "I am really proud of myself for doing the best I could this year. I was in a new age division, met the standard for New Balance Nationals, and performed well against Chanel Brissett; she competed in the Olympic Trials!"





MALE YOUTH ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Third time's a charm

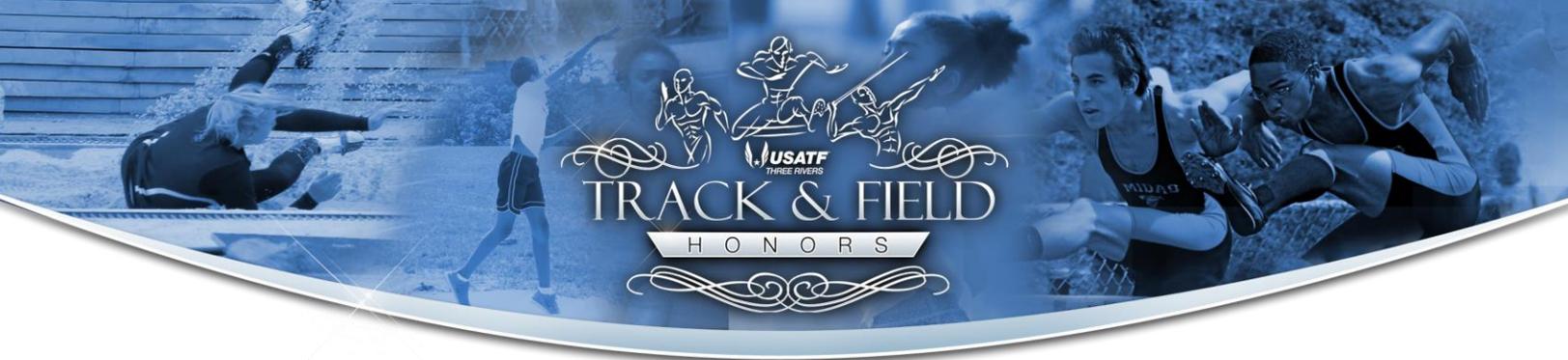
Ayden Owens is no stranger to a lot of hard work. As a multi-event athlete, he trains long hours for several disciplines. Over the last year he has had one of the most grueling track & field competition schedules competing since December of 2015.

The non-stop competing has led to one of his most successful seasons on the track. In May, he captured the 300 meter hurdles title at the Class AAA PIAA track and field championships at Shippensburg University.

In June, Owens participated in the USATF Junior Outdoor Championships in the 400mH. This meet is a *who's who* of the next generation of track and field superstars and competitors must meet certain standards to participate. The competition is often filled with some of the country's top division 1 athletes and can serve as a qualifier or "trials" event in world competition years.

Owens has participated in the multi event competition twice before at the USATF National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships. In 2014 he participated in the 13-14 boys pentathlon and placed 9th, just outside of All-American honors. Last year he claimed silver in 15-16 decathlon. On his 3rd attempt, he won the national crown in the 15-16 age division with a personal best of 6201 points. He also added a national title in the 400m Hurdles with a time of 53.13; not a bad day at the office. Owens is true example of how hard work and persistence can pay off.



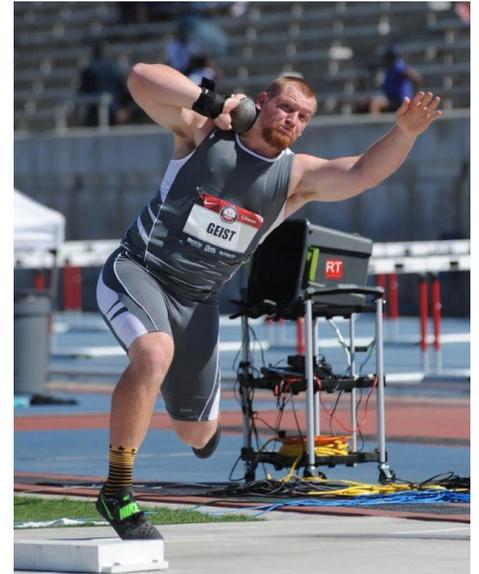


OPEN ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

The Throwing Gene

If you live in the state of Pennsylvania and follow you track & field, you have most certainly heard of the name Jordan Geist. He's racked up dozens of 1st place performances and records in both the indoor and outdoor season for shot put and discus. Some events included the PIAA State Championships, Annual Butler Track & Field Invitational, Knoch Relays and the prestigious Penn Relays. His stellar competition year ended with him being named the Pennsylvania Gatorade Boy's Track & Field Athlete of the Year.

Geist started his career at a young age perhaps inheriting a *throwing gene* from his parents. Both were track & field athletes who competed for Slippery Rock University. His mother was a 2-time All American in the shot put and his father a 4-time All American in the Javelin. However, even with great examples in his parents, Geist still had to work to develop his talent. He started throwing pretty young with a focus on perfecting technique. Back then he was actually one of the smaller athletes and didn't necessary dominate the competition. It wasn't until 8th grade that he started seeing the fruits of his labor. Geist's technique had transitioned from gliding to spinning and he began building size and strength.



Over the next several years, Geist started to make a name for himself on becoming one of the top prospects in the state of Pennsylvania and across the country. Of all the throwing disciples, the shot put is his favorite because of the technique and athleticism required to perform well. "The shot put is my favorite because it is very technical" Geist says. "It really is a misconception that you have to be the biggest and strongest. The more athletic you are, the better you perform."

Of all his achievements in 2016, Geist says his performance at Penn Relays has been the most memorable. "I had the opportunity to compete in front about 30 members of my family which was really cool. I was awarded the Male Athlete of the Meet and got the take home the Penn Relays Wheel!"

As a senior, Geist is preparing for his final year of high school competition and beginning the recruitment process. He does want to compete in college and major in Sports Management or Sports Administration with the ultimate goal of becoming an Athletic Director. Outside of school Geist spends most of his time being a normal teenager hanging out with friends and golfing.

Geist expressed a lot of gratitude and enthusiasm when talking about the Honors award. "I am very honored to receive this award. I really love USATF; it's where I got my start when I was young."





FEMALE MASTERS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Age is just a number

Lisa Lucas' running career began at the young age of 7 years old with Dormont Track Club. One day, she decided to run and it was as simple as that. No experience, no family tradition – just the desire to do something new. So the day before her 8th birthday, she entered a local community race. During those days, there were not many distances contested outside of the 10k. If you wanted to run, young or old, you laced up your shoes and entered whatever race the community had to offer. Almost every weekend, Lucas remembers participating in a 10k consistently traversing a 6.2 mile course as one of the younger athletes.

The continued racing would eventually lead to successful high school and collegiate cross country careers. At Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) Lucas was a varsity athlete on the cross country and track and field teams. During her tenure she was an All-American athlete and ran on the 1985 national cross country team. After college, Lucas continued to run but by the age of 29 she had married and started a family. She made the decision to stay at home and raise her kids, shelving a competitive running. At 41, long after her prime years, she decided to run again. Just like at age 7, there was no master plan, no external forces, just the desire to get back on the horse; simple. Lucas started training on her own with no formal coach or target times. The goal was to listen to her body and add mileage as fitness improved.

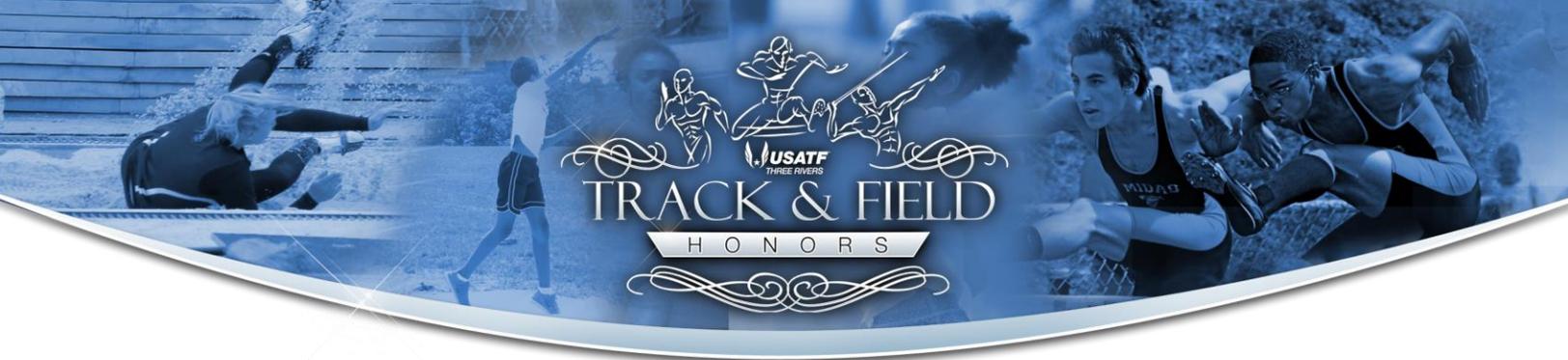


Lucas would continue running and by her mid 40s, training partners encouraged her to enter competitive races. So just like decades before, she began competing in community races. She was racking up first place finishes in some high profile events outperforming men and younger athletes. This ultimately led to a stellar 2015 season culminating in lifetime PRs in the 5K, 10k, and Marathon. This same year she was named the 2015 National USATF Masters Woman Runner of the Year for her age division (45-49).

Despite being compromised by injury, Lucas still had a respectable 2016 competition season again winning several community events and the 10,000m at the 2016 USATF Master Outdoor Track & Field Championships. This was the first time Lucas had run on a track, competitively, in 30 years.

Lucas was honored to receive the TRA honors award and credited her success to the family support, "I get a lot of joy from seeing my kids proud of me." Another driving force was just the journey itself. "As women, we make a lot of sacrifices. I am grateful to take time off to raise my children and return to the sport and still be able to perform well. What's most important to me is performing to the best of my abilities. I have won races but wasn't happy because I didn't do what I was capable of." Lucas is now 50 and doesn't show any signs of slowing down. She is training through the fall and hopes to be back and free of injury in early 2017. Her story teaches us to enjoy the ups, downs, and pauses of your athletic journey. More importantly it reminds us that age is truly just a number.





MALE MASTERS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Affinity for the spear



Erick Friedman didn't start competing in the javelin until college. In fact, it wasn't even something on his radar until he was sidelined by a football injury. Even still, his entry into the sport wasn't a glamorous one. One day he saw the track team practicing and decided to go watch. Soon the coach was asked him to try the javelin and the rest is history. Although his introduction to the sport was easy, his success didn't come so easily. In one of his first competitions he placed 40 out of 45 competitors and had to become a student of the discipline.

Friedman's persistence and determination would eventually pay off. He left Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) as an All-American with a true affinity for the javelin. Friedman would go on to participate after college, coach and own a company that makes javelins. The company, SpearWerx, began because Friedman wanted to provide an affordable, high quality alternative to the existing options. The company offers great products for \$200-\$300 and is also a distributor of the Turbojav.

Over the last few years, Friedman has been at the top of his game securing becoming the National Champion in the 2015 and 2016 USATF Masters Outdoor Championships and earning All-American honors. Unlike 2015 where he was dealing with injury, Friedman had a great competition in Grand Rapids this year. He was able to secure the victory setting the bar for the rest of his competitors.

Friedman added the 2016 Canadian National Championship to his list of accolades by simply searching for another summer competition. He made the 2.5 hour trek to Ontario and took home the crown in front of the largest turnout the event has experienced.

Friedman is currently training to compete in the World Masters Athletic Championships in Perth, Australia. The competition will be held from October 25 – November 6, 2016 with javelin competition on the 29th. He has spent the last several weeks speed and weight training, working with the medicine ball and doing cardio. He is currently seeded 4th and has a very good chance of winning the overall competition.

Friedman thinks the Honors program is great for the Association and especially masters athletes. "I'm very appreciative of the award. As masters athletes, we are still very competitive and in great shape!"





COACH AND OFFICIAL OF THE YEAR

Turning lemons into lemonade

When one hears the phrase “turning lemons into lemonade” you often think of someone turning a negative situation into a positive situation for **themselves**. But for, Oronde Sharif, his negative experiences as a high school track athlete resulted into him becoming a coach and contributing to positive experiences of many young athletes. Since 2003, Sharif has served as head coach of Nadia Track Club producing dozens of regional champions, several national championships, and exposing countless others to college. Year in and year out, Sharif takes a small group of athletes and provides them with 3 key resources to help them become successful. He describes his efforts as simply “wanting to give back” because as a promising athlete he didn’t have the right coaches in place to help him realize some of his dreams. “My coaches were just atrocious,” says Sharif. “They didn’t teach us anything and even worse didn’t inform us of the opportunities in our sport. I didn’t even know about the Penn Relays!”

Those three resources Sharif speaks of are: 1) Information. “I try to watch a lot of sport and training videos to ensure I am informed on the latest techniques.” 2) Access: “I make certain our athletes know there is life after high school whether they want to pursue athletics or better their education.” 3) Love of Sport: “I truly love track & field. It is not hard for me to come out and coach these kids because I really believe track and field brings the best out in you and can lead to bigger and better things.”

Sharif coaches all running events on the track and has a close-knit, small group. There are never more than 30 athletes each season which ensures coaches are always available. His coaching staff is even smaller with his wife, LaTonya Salley-Sharif, serving as co-head coach and handling all field events. Coach Buddy and Coach Tom Ray focus on other areas and disciplines as needed.

Sharif pulls double duty at Three Rivers competitions to serve as an official. He started officiating because of need and a strong influence from others. “I blame Bruce Long for everything,” Sharif jokes. He has officiated at college and national events including marshalling at the 2016 USATF Hersey Outdoor Championships. Other duties have included hurdle crew, long jump, triple jump and pole vault. Sharif’s ultimate officiating goal is to serve as Track Referee. “I enjoy problem solving, operations and management.”

Whether, it’s coaching, officiating, or serving on the TRA board, you’ll always find Sharif giving back. He was very honored to be recognized as a 2016 honors recipient for both coach and official. “We have a number of people in our association who have done exceptional jobs as head coaches while simultaneously serving as officials. It’s great to see what they are able to get their athletes to do but it’s also rewarding because you know they have these children’s best interests at heart. I am honored to be around and work amongst those who were nominated.”

