

“She’s a star”: Fiona Benson continues to impress

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DAWSON CREEK – Fiona Benson, the 23-year-old runner from Tomslake who has spent the spring and summer of 2015 blowing away the Canadian running community, has yet again bested her own time and several others with another impressive finish at the FloTrack Throwdown track meet in Portland, Oregon on Saturday August 8.

Benson ran the fastest mile in the world for women, at 4:25.79.

The mile is not a popular event for women, but the most impressive thing about this race was her outstanding performance, which saw her running most of it far ahead of the pack.

“FloTrack Throwdown meant a lot to me as my last competitive opportunity before Worlds,” said Benson in an email from South Korea where she is currently training for the (IAAF-International Association of Athletics Federations) World Championships.

“I’m still so new to this level of competition that I’m grateful for any chance to get on the line and battle it out. The Portland meet was amazing because it had a strong competitive field but they also tried to make it really spectator friendly... It was the type of day that makes me really, really glad I’m in this sport. I didn’t know what to expect from a mile—I’ve been doing 800s pretty much all season—but looking back I’m not surprised I responded well to that environment.”

Benson’s coach Mark Bomba takes a more objective perspective on the event: “The time was good, relatively speaking,” he said, “it was faster than she’s ever run, but it was more how she just sort of dominated the race, and took off with about 600 to go and just dropped a girl who two, three weeks ago ran 4:04 for 1500 metres.”

“In that regards, the time was good, just off Olympic standards,” Bomba said. “It would have been nice to get it, she was only about a half a second off, but she did it with such ease, that now she’s put herself in a situation where I’m sure once she gets an opportunity—she’s got some races scheduled after World Championships already in Europe—and I’m sure the first one she’s gets in, as long as it’s a decent pace, I’m

sure she'll break Olympic standard, and who knows what she'll do from there."

Heading into the World Championships this month where she will be competing in the 800 metre event, Benson has signed with an agent—Chris Layne of Total Sports—and seems to be poised for greatness.

Top athletic agent and former elite runner Ray Flynn emailed Bomba after Benson's run at FloTrack, and wrote of the young runner: "she's a star."

With this latest win at FloTrack Throwdown, the high-profile nature of that race will bring more notoriety to Benson and with it the possibility of sponsorships, says Bomba.

"The big thing was like, she's unsponsored, she's lining up against all of these top American athletes who are very well known; in the U.S. are stars in the sport, and she just kind of lines up and proceeds to demolish the field. It's kind of funny, actually, to watch," he said.

After the IAAF World Championship in Beijing this month, Bomba says there is the possibility that Benson could be entered for participation in the IAAF Diamond League, an all-star track and field league with events—mostly in Europe—drawing huge crowds of fans: "They're kind of considered, for lack of a better term, like the all-star games in hockey or baseball . . . basically to get into these meets you would be considered one of the best in the world."

Benson says that training alone in South Korea has been a challenge, as she's accustomed to training with her old Trinity Western group, but a great coaching and therapy team is keeping her on track and the sessions are getting easier.

The competition begins on August 22, and Bomba is more than confident in Benson's ability to perform well.

"She's still shell-shocked from everything that's happened," he said, "it's been a whirlwind, some [past] conversations we would have, like about an agent, now are a reality . . . I think she shocked the Canadian and North American running community—I have a feeling she's going to shock the world. I just see the workouts, I know what's going on in other performances in the world, so I'm not going to make any specific predictions, but I think she could walk out of there maybe surprising herself and surprising just about everyone else."

Benson is currently placed at 43rd in the world for 800 metres, which she will be competing in at the World Championships in Beijing.

“I’m a bit nervous but very excited to be approaching this level of competition,” Benson said.

“I like a challenge, and in terms of competition it doesn’t get much more challenging than this! My naivety at this point may even be helping me out, because I don’t really know what’s ahead, so I just keep doing what I’ve been doing and hurdle things as they come. My string of PBs [personal bests] earlier in the season showed me that I have more to give; this is a chance to find out exactly how much more.”

For more information about the IAAF World Championships go to www.iaaf.org

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