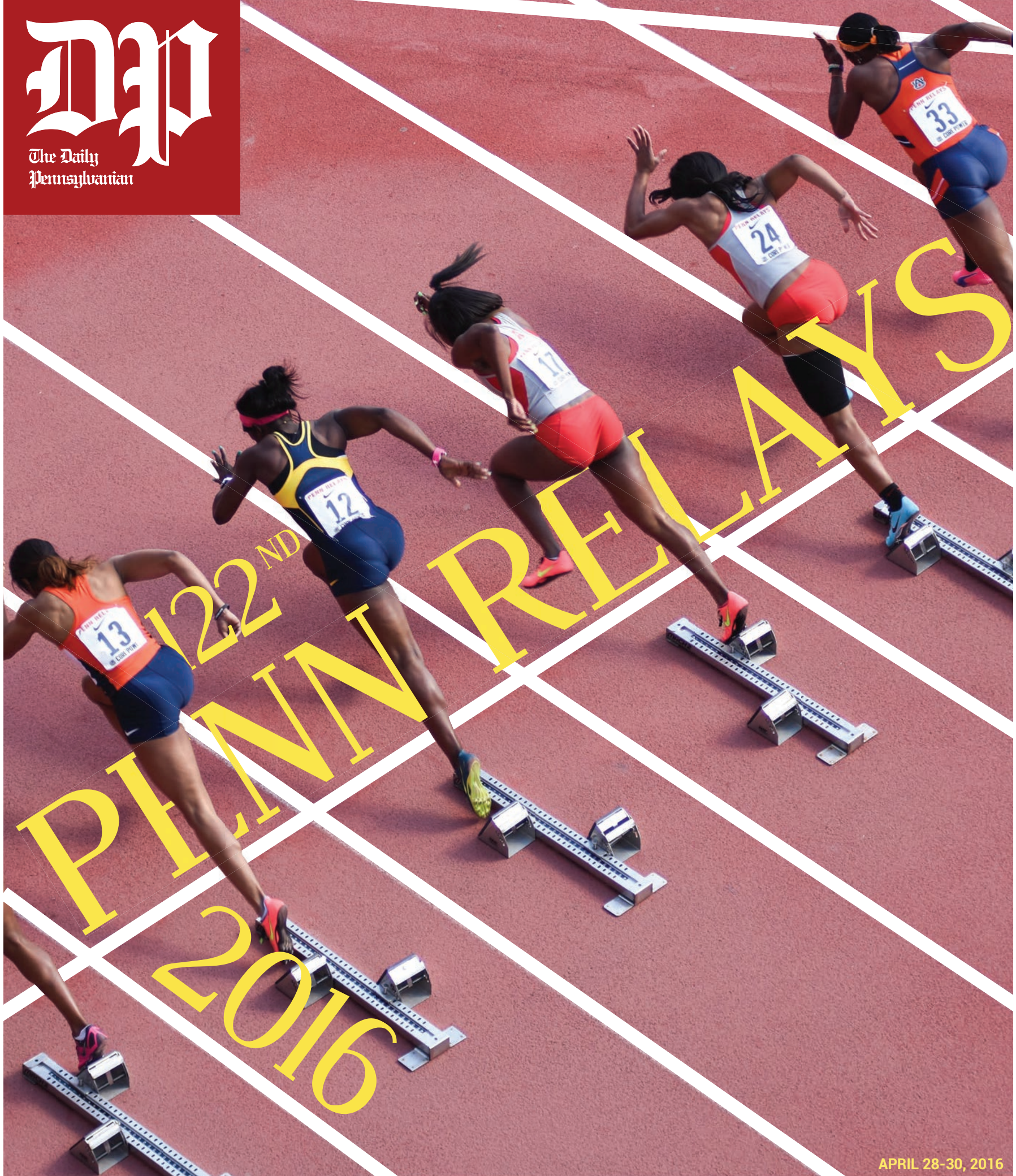


DP

The Daily
Pennsylvanian



APRIL 28-30, 2016

Relays showcase Penn's potential

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**NICK
BUCHTA**

This weekend, Franklin Field will be full. This weekend, the packed stands will be a reminder of just the kind of atmosphere we can have around sports at Penn as fans and athletes literally cross the globe to come to University City.

The crowds won't be for a lacrosse game, and Penn football isn't the main attraction either. No, they will be for an event that has defined Penn Athletics for well over a century.

The Penn Relays.

Every year, for three days, all eyes turn to 33rd Street. Penn gets the chance to highlight what University City brings to the table — it's more than just a showcase on the track. Going on 122 years, the Relays have formed an integral part of what Penn can be in the world of athletics.

At the Penn Relays, the past, present and future of track and field are on full display. The three-time high school champion can emerge as the best discus thrower in the world, as current Penn senior Sam Mattis has for the Quakers. Old champions come back, with the odd gold medal-winning sprinter somewhere in the stands. And USA versus the World speaks for itself.

North America's largest annual track and field meet takes place right in the heart of University City. To be honest, as it has become a part of my yearly routines, I've tended to overlook that fact. One of Penn's crowning achievements has been putting on one of the world's great sporting events.

And it's often taken almost for granted.

But the Penn Relays should also serve as a symbol of the work yet to be done in Penn Athletics — a yearly reminder that there is yet more to be built.

As Athletic Director Grace Calhoun has resolved to take on the challenge of making Penn Athletics a part of the average student's experience once again, the Relays offer a glimpse into the potential for what that could look like.

Only 6,007 people were on hand to watch Penn football clinch its 17th Ivy title against Cornell last year.

To be sure, the days when Penn football could fill Franklin Field have passed — Ivy League football has long since changed and the size and interests of the student body put a limit on how far Calhoun's efforts can go.

And that's where the Relays come in.

To the casual sports fan or the apathetic student, I'd suggest you make your way over to Franklin Field on Saturday. Take a look at what Penn Athletics can be when a community comes together around a sporting event.

Calhoun has invested a huge amount of energy and capital in bringing the Red and Blue to the forefront of the student experience. This year's Relays can mark a turning point in what Penn Athletics means on campus.

With Rio just around the corner, students have a chance to preview the Olympics right in their backyard. Mattis, Kelsey Hay and Tom Awad all have their eyes on the Olympic Trials and beyond — yet they just scratch the surface. Jamaican Olympian Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, American World Championship English Gardner and any number of dark horses who could emerge at the U.S. Olympic Trials highlight one of the most exciting weekends track and field in North America has to offer.

Even if the competitions themselves don't offer much appeal, the Carnival should. From Nike tents to the Jamaican village; from fantastic food to the latest gear, Franklin Field will be worth the trip for just about anyone.

If nothing else, take advantage of what will hopefully be nice weather, take a break from the stress of reading days and take a walk over to 33rd Street. You might be surprised by what you see when you get there.

Students come to University City for myriad reasons — from academics to location — and the Relays offer a reminder that Penn's world-class offerings go beyond the classroom.

Penn has the potential to become the locus of a thriving sports culture. If that is to happen, the Penn Relays will be its foundation.

NICK BUCHTA is a College junior from Olmsted Falls, Ohio, and is senior sports editor of The Daily Pennsylvanian. He can be reached at buchta@thedp.com.

What to watch this weekend



THURSDAY

5:40 p.m.

College Women's DMR Championship of America

THURSDAY

6:45 p.m.

College Women's Javelin Throw Championship

THURSDAY

7:45 p.m.

College Men's 3K Steeplechase Championship

FRIDAY

1:10 p.m.

High School Girls' 4x400 Championship of America

FRIDAY

2:25 p.m.

High School Girls' 4x100 Championship of America

FRIDAY

2:35 p.m.

College Men's DMR Championship of America

FRIDAY

3:22 p.m.

Masters Men's 100m Dash 70 and Older

FRIDAY

5:52 p.m.

Masters Mixed 4x100 70 and Older

SATURDAY

8:00 a.m.

Olympic Development Women's 5K Racewalk



SATURDAY

9:00 a.m.

High School Boys' 400m Hurdles Championship

SATURDAY

12:30 p.m.

College Men's Discus Throw Championship

SATURDAY

12:38 p.m.

USA vs. the World Men 4x100

SATURDAY

12:50 p.m.

USA vs. the World Women 4x100

SATURDAY

1:15 p.m.

College Men's 4xMile Championship of America



SATURDAY

2:00 p.m.

USA vs. the World Men 4x200

SATURDAY

2:10 p.m.

USA vs. the World Women 4x200

SATURDAY

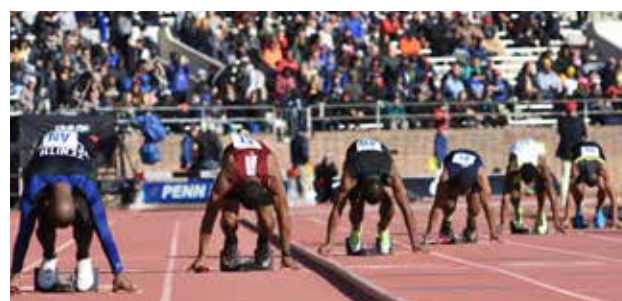
2:35 p.m.

USA vs. the World Women 4x400

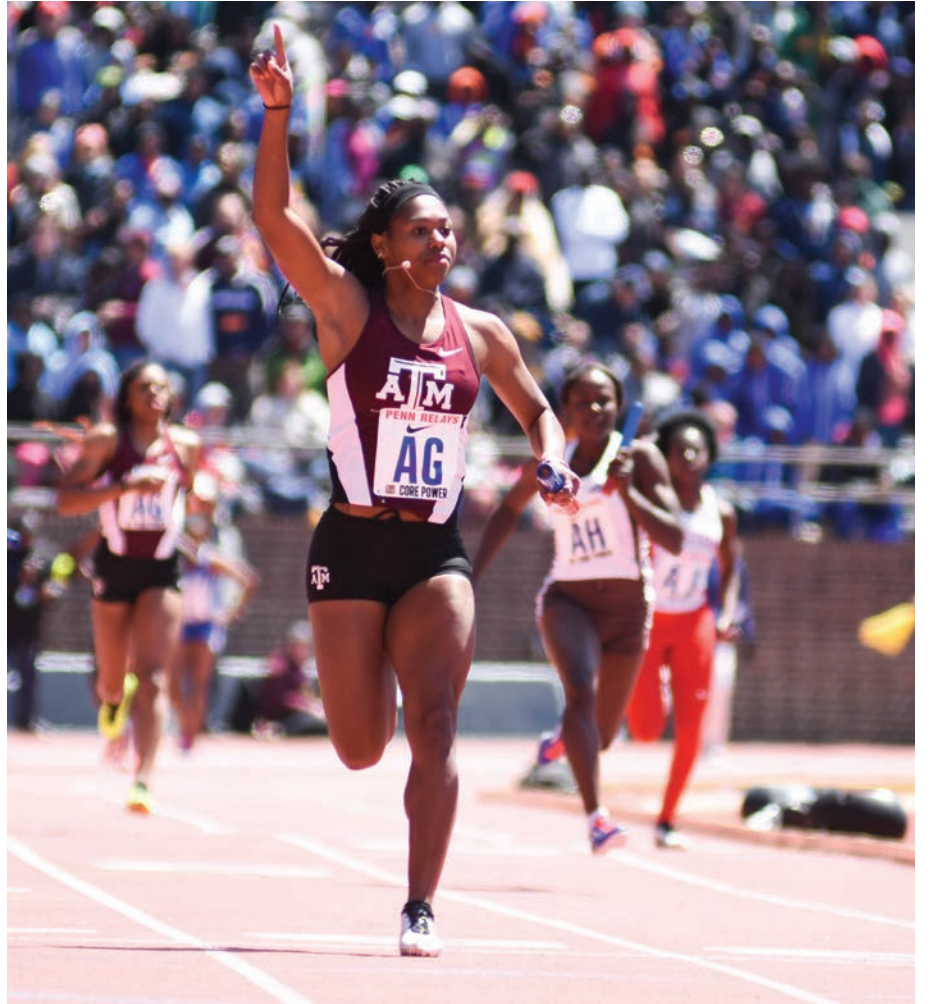
SATURDAY

2:52 p.m.

USA vs. the World Men 4x400



2015 Penn Relays in photos



Back on track

Renovations to Franklin Field precede 2016 Relays

WILL SNOW

Sports Editor-elect

Like any aging lady, Franklin Field got a facelift this year — and it is a big one.

The new surface of Penn's track is immaculate — the colors pop out enough to make any graphic designer jump with joy. But the high-tech surface isn't just about looks.

"Having a brand new surface has been amazing," Penn director of track and field Steve Dolan said. "I think we've got the perfect combination of a fast surface that we can run really good times on, and really have high performance. It's also something we can train on regularly. It feels good. It's also nice just to train on something so aesthetically pleasing, with the red track and the blue around it."

A couple of technical — but extremely important — additions to the new surface are the creation of a ninth lane and the lengthening of the back straightaway to allow full-length hurdle and sprint events. The new nine-lane track has the capacity to hold more events in less time, but also a higher level of competition. According to Dolan, that was one of the primary goals of the renovations.

"We would like to hold additional things at Franklin Field on all levels. We added another collegiate meet this

year. We're going to be the host site for U.S. Club Nationals this summer. We're also working on hosting a Olympic Trials qualifying distance night in the summertime for those trying to get those Olympic qualifying times. We'd like to keep expanding in the years to come, whether it's high school meets or world-class competition."

The new track itself is not the only change within the stadium. Alterations have also been applied to the high jump and triple jump pits, and the renovations have even been so specific as to reposition the pole vault area to work better with the wind.

"It's a great collaboration between Penn Facilities, the Penn Relays and Penn track," Dolan said. "Now we can have something that we're really proud of."

Proud indeed — the Quakers can be proud of many things regarding Franklin Field. And according to Dolan, the renovations could also help in attracting some new Baby Quakers as well.

"I think it will attract new students to Penn — everyone wants to train at a world-class facility, and we have one. From both a training and a recruiting standpoint, having Franklin Field at tip-top shape like it is is definitely an advantage for us."

So with a new track, new mega-events, and new recruits, it looks like the aging relic of Philly may have just become the new cougar on the block. Look out, young'uns.



ONE FINAL SHOT

by Cole Jacobson

Three Ivy League championships. Two All-American selections. Three qualifications at the NCAA Track and Field Championships. One national title.

And the scariest part? Penn discus thrower Sam Mattis is just getting started.

After securing Penn's first individual men's national title since 2003, one would think that Mattis might rest on his laurels — except the senior has done anything but. With his stunning effort of

67.45 meters at the 2016 Philadelphia College Classic, Mattis abruptly asserted himself as a contender for far more than merely a repeat title at the NCAAs.

"This is something that really kind of not only moves up the timetable of this season, but also where I thought I'd be in my career," Mattis said the week after his record-breaking mark. "Now that I hit that — and I wasn't even feeling especially great [entering that meet] — I think

this season can be pretty big."

Any time an athlete hits a personal best by more than 16 feet in any event — an absolute rarity, by the way — one might assume that the performance was simply a result of good luck or special preparation on that given day.

But if one looks deeply at Mattis' history on and off the track, it's clear that his breakthrough, and any that may come in the following months, are actually several decades in the making.

A family tradition

Countless athletes are first introduced to their eventual passions by a relative looking to pass on knowledge, and Mattis was no exception. In the mid-1980s, Mattis' father, Marlon, specialized in the hammer throw and weight throw at William and Mary, ranking fourth and second place in school history, respectively, in the two events.

Consequently, the younger Mattis was innately given the pedigree to succeed in track and field, and the New Jersey native never looked back. With his father as a coach, Mattis launched an all-out assault on the record books at East Brunswick High School.

After winning state titles in the boys' discus throw in 2010 and 2011, Mattis saved his best efforts for last in his final high school season. Not only did he take home his third consecutive state championship, but, in the process, he broke the all-time New Jersey high school discus record set by Ron Dayne — who proceeded to play eight years in the NFL and still holds the NCAA Division I FBS all-time record with 7,125 career rushing yards.

University City beckons

But even before his status as a high school legend came to a close, word on 33rd Street regarding the heralded superstar was already buzzing.

To most track and field fans, the Penn Relays are renowned for the professional talent on the track — rightfully so, considering the household names like Usain Bolt, Allyson Felix and Tyson Gay that have laced up their spikes in recent years.

But the meet also offers high school divisions to give nearby youth talent an opportunity to perform in a high-pressure environment — and it was through this medium that Mattis made a name for himself in Philadelphia far before he ever donned a Penn jersey.

As a sophomore, Mattis took second place behind Jamaica's Chad Wright. In 2011, Mattis again finished as the top American competitor but couldn't best Jamaican Traves Smikle, who set a still-

standing high school meet record with a gargantuan toss of 69.55 meters (with the 1.6-kilogram high school disc).

By the time the meet rolled around in 2012, the 6-foot-1 superstar had already committed to Penn, and he made sure to put on a show on his future stomping grounds. In his last opportunity at the high school level, Mattis threw 64.60 meters to win by more than 18 feet.

"It's nice to finally win after being second two times — it's been a huge goal

“ This is something that really kind of not only moves up the timetable of this season, but also where I thought I'd be in my career.”

- Sam Mattis

of mine for a long time," Mattis told NewJersey.com after the meet. "There is nothing bigger than winning at Penn; this is the best moment I've ever had throwing."

But, as Mattis would soon learn, the great moments were only beginning.

Topping the charts

As was the case four years prior, Mattis' freshman season saw him immediately become his team's top discus thrower, and Mattis won his first Ivy League championship in the event in 2013 with a mark of 58.34 meters.

Mattis' progression naturally continued in his sophomore year, as he won his second conference title before qualifying for NCAA Finals for the first time, where he finished in fifth place nationally.

Initially, junior year seemed to bring a return to Earth for the superstar, as he failed to reach his personal record at any point during the regular season.

But as the 2015 postseason came, Mattis would cement his status in Penn track immortality. After winning his third straight conference title, Mattis trailed Tennessee senior Tavis Bailey by two inches entering his sixth and final attempt at the NCAA Finals — and delivered a clutch final toss of 62.48 meters to take home the national championship.

"Obviously that was an awesome accomplishment for me; that's something that I've wanted to do since my freshman year, and to actually get it done was awe-

Mattis missing only Relays title from college resume



One final try

Considering the looming presence of the 2016 Olympics and the fact that Mattis owns the best discus throw in the world this year, it's evident that his goals go far beyond anything he can accomplish wearing the Red and Blue.

But if there's any belief that Mattis' national team dreams diminish the importance of this weekend's Penn Relays to the senior in any capacity, Mattis' recent history at the meet easily lays this falsehood to rest.

In 2013, Mattis finished fourth in the collegiate discus throw at the Penn Relays, finishing a spot behind Smikle for the second time in three years. In 2014, Mattis finished in second place as LSU junior Rodney Brown set a meet record to take the title.

Then, last year, the narrative was awfully similar, as Mattis took fourth place while Brown set a meet record at 65.04 meters for the second consecutive year.

As a result, just about the only thing missing from Mattis' collegiate resume is a Penn Relays title — and just like he did four years ago, he's entering his final opportunity with nothing but victory on his mind.

"It's something that I've wanted since my freshman year and just haven't been able to get done; I won it in my last year of high school, and I thought I'd be able to come into college and replicate that success a lot easier than I have been, but the Penn Relays is just generally one of the best meets in the world," Mattis said. "It's looking like — at least I hope — that this is the year, so I'm going to go out there and try to throw as far as I can."

Even with Brown having graduated, the field opposing Mattis will be quite strong. Jamaica will be sending University of West Indies at Mona senior Fedrick Dacres, who finished in third place at last year's Penn Relays and currently ranks in fourth place in the world with a best mark of 65.94 meters in 2016. In addition, UWI-Mona will also be sending Smikle, who topped Mattis at the Penn Relays in both 2011 and 2013.

"I think [I can win this year] honestly. ... It has been tough, in past years — some of the top guys from Jamaica have thrown really far, and obviously [Dacres] is in great shape," Mattis said. "It's never easy, and everybody really steps up."

But as Mattis seeks his first collegiate title at his seventh consecutive Penn Relays, nothing short of perfection will satisfy him as he enters the homestretch of what's already arguably been his most accomplished season in a Penn uniform.

"I'm feeling a lot better than I usually do, and the goal is to break the Penn Relays record for disc," Mattis said. "And I definitely won't be happy if I don't win, so I'm going to want to step up and do the best that I can."

some," Mattis said. "I'm still not sure if it's hit me yet."

"The Throw"

With a national title already in hand and the general status of being a second-semester senior threatening, one might have expected some complacency to settle in on Mattis' final season.

But if there ever were any doubts, they were all silenced — to put it politely — by what can simply be referred to as "The Throw."

Mattis has always been optimistic about his career accomplishments, but not even he could've anticipated what was coming at the Philadelphia College Classic on March 19.

And when that first throw of the meet landed at an inconceivable 67.45 meters, the world was put on watch.

In addition to still standing as the best throw worldwide in 2016, Mattis' throw was the farthest ever by any American

“ It's looking like — at least I hope — that this is the year.”

- Sam Mattis

collegiate athlete. He became the first American at any age to surpass 67 meters since Jarred Rome did so back in August 2011. If placed in the 2012 Olympic Games, Mattis' throw would've taken fourth in the men's discus competition.

Olympic hopefuls come to Penn

Relays serve as gathering spot for best in the world

LAINE HIGGINS
Sports Editor

The Philadelphia Eagles aren't the only stars that have graced Franklin Field with their presence in the past. Over the years, the Penn Relays has drawn some of the biggest names — both American and international — in track and field to compete in University City.

Back in 2010, the fastest man on earth, Usain Bolt, made an appearance at the Frank. He and the rest of the Jamaican men's 4x100-meter relay set a meet record in the USA versus the World race with a blazing time of 37.90 seconds.

American star Justin Gatlin, who won gold in the 100m in the 2004 Athens Olympics, is a Relays regular, making several appearances in the early 2000s for Tennessee and competing professionally on the United States relay teams for the last four years.

Gatlin was once again invited to compete in this year's Relays.

Fellow American sprinter Tyson Gay was also invited to the 2016 Relays and will reportedly be competing on the United States 4x100m relay for the USA versus the World race. Gay's track heyday came in the late-2000s, when he won three events at the 2007 World Championships in Osaka and later set the American record in the event in 2009 in 9.69 seconds. He is just now returning to the sport after serving a one-year ban in 2014 for testing

positive for an illegal substance.

Olympic years tend to bring an even longer list of professional competitors to Philadelphia, as many athletes use the Relays to get a taste of what the world's fastest runners have to offer before their respective Olympic Trials meets. For Americans, the Relays come nearly two months before trials, held the first week of July in Eugene, Ore., where only the top three qualifiers in each event earn berths on the American Olympic team. Jamaican runners are in a similar position, with Senior

Trials taking place from June 30-July 3 in Kingston, Jamaica.

This year, female sprint stars Shelly-Ann Fraser-Price of Jamaica, English Gardner and DeeDee Trotter of the United States will reportedly be competing at the Penn Relays.

Fraser-Price took home the gold in the women's 100-meter race in both the 2008 and 2012 Olympics, making her only the third female to go back-to-back in the sprint in Olympics history. Now 29, Fraser-Price has the chance to become the first ever three-peat winner in the event this summer, but she first is expected to run the 4x100m with Jamaica at Penn Relays.

If anyone is to unseat Fraser-Price from the 100m throne, it very well may be the rising 24-year-old star Gardner, a New Jersey native whose personal best of 10.79 seconds in the event in 2015 ranked second in the world only behind Fraser-Price's 10.74. Although the two won't battle individually this weekend, they will likely go head-to-head in the loaded 4x100m race.

Trotter has had a long and successful career as a long sprinter, earning gold medals at both the 2004 and 2012 Olympics as a member of the USA women's 4x400m team while also medaling in the individual 400m in 2012 with a third-place finish. Now 33, Trotter has run in the 4x400m with USA for six consecutive Penn Relays, earning titles at the meet in 2010, 2013 and 2014.

Although they're not professionals yet, many college athletes competing at the Penn Relays are Olympic hopefuls. Penn boasts two of its own, in senior javelin specialist Kelsey Hay and senior discus thrower Sam Mattis.

At the Philadelphia College Classic in March, Mattis recorded the longest discus throw in the world — a staggering 67.45 meters. That throw would have placed fourth at the 2012 London Olympics and makes Mattis a top contender for the U.S. Olympic team come July.

Hay finished in fifth in the women's javelin at last year's Penn Relays and, after going on to take 13th at Outdoor NCAA Championships in 2015, is poised to improve upon that result in the 122nd running of the Penn Relays.

Olympians at the Penn Relays



Tyson Gay

Known for: American-record holder in the 100-meter dash (9.69 seconds), the second-fastest time ever in the world behind Usain Bolt

Event: 4x100m in USA vs. The World



DeeDee Trotter

Known for: Winning gold in the 4x400m at the 2004 and 2012 Olympics, winning bronze in the 400m at the 2012 Olympics

Event: 4x400m in USA vs. The World (for the seventh consecutive year)



Justin Gatlin

Known for: Winning gold in the 100m at the 2004 Olympics

Event: 4x100m in USA vs. The World



Shelly-Ann Fraser-Price

Known for: Winning gold in the 100m at the 2008 and 2012 Olympics for Jamaica

Event: 4x100m in USA vs. The World



English Gardner

Known for: 24-year-old rising star in the 100m and the second fastest 100m time in 2015 behind Shelly-Ann Fraiser-Pierce

Event: 4x100m in USA vs. The World

Matt Mantica | Online Graphics Associate

NCAA's best ready to compete

Every region represented in collegiate competition

JACOB ADLER
Associate Sports Editor

While the nation's eyes turn to Franklin Field for USA versus the World on Saturday, there will also be some of the nation's top college athletes arriving from across the United States to compete in the college Championship of America events. Here's a look at some of the collegiate competitors to watch out for:

Jasmine Todd, Oregon
A redshirt junior, Jasmine

Todd is participating in her third Penn Relays, having finished second in the 4x100-meter relay in 2014 and first in the sprint medley relay in 2015. She is ranked nationally in the top 20 in four events; the 100m dash (No. 1), 200m dash (No. 19), long jump (No. 4) and triple jump (No. 19).

Hannah Cunliffe, Oregon
Right beside Todd is teammate Hannah Cunliffe, who ranks third in the 100m and eighth in the 200m. Cunliffe transferred to Oregon after her freshman year from Oklahoma, where she was a second team All-American in the indoor 60m.

Kellion Knibb, Florida State
The 2014 Penn Relays champion in the discus, Kellion Knibb continued her tear after the Relays, claiming two more meet wins in the event before a fifth-place finish at the NCAA Championships. Currently ranked second in the country, she has competed in the discus three times this outdoor season, winning twice, with two marks better than her best Penn Relays throw from two years ago.

Desmond Palmer, Pittsburgh
After finishing second in the 400m hurdles at last year's Penn Relays and helping set a school-record time in the 4x400m relay,

Desmond Palmer was named a second team All-American, and he currently holds the top spot in the national 400m hurdle rankings. This outdoor season, he has already posted wins in the 110m hurdles, 400m hurdles and 4x400m relay.

John Ampomah, Mid. Tennessee
The reigning Penn Relays champion in the javelin, John Ampomah took second in the NCAA Championships last year, and his 81.55m throw from last year's Relays would rank second nationally if it occurred in the 2016 season. The Accra, Ghana, native has competed in the javelin four times so far in

the outdoor season and has won each time.

Elinor Purrier, New Hampshire
The holder of this season's best time in the steeplechase, Elinor Purrier qualified for U.S. Olympic Trials just a few weeks ago at the Ocean State Invitational in Providence, R.I. She finished third in the mile at the NCAA Indoor Championships this year and had the fastest individual mile time nationally during the indoor season. In the NCAA Championships last year, she placed seventh in the steeplechase with a time she has already bested this season by more than six seconds.

DMR dominance for Villanova

Wildcats seek fifth straight Relays victory

JACOB SNYDER
Associate Sports Editor

There's succeeding, and then there's success.

When the Villanova women's distance medley relay team collected its first Penn Relays title in 1984, not even the school itself could have predicted the decades of success that were to follow.

The DMR is a race that is comprised of four legs, each of varying length. The first leg is 1,200 meters, followed by a 400m leg, an 800m leg, and a 1,600m final leg. All legs are considered "middle distance runs" aside from the 400m, which is considered a sprint.

Since the inception of the DMR at the Penn Relays in 1980, Villanova has amassed 14 victories, almost tripling the total of Tennessee, the second most successful school with five wins.

The 14 DMR titles are not only the most from a school in the event itself, but they are also the most that a school has earned in any of the women's outdoor events at the Penn Relays.

Perhaps even more impressive than the number of titles is the Wildcats' ability to dominate the event for consecutive years, with

five titles in a row from 1987-91, and more notably, the last four from 2012-15.

Despite these remarkable feats, recent races indicate that the defending champs might be looking at a tough task to make it a five-peat in this year's race, held this Thursday at 5:40 PM at Franklin Field. However, Villanova women's track coach Gina Procaccio remains adamant that while her team may not be the favorites, past triumphs indicate that they'll undoubtedly be competitive.

"For some reason, I always feel like [on paper] we're the underdogs here, even though we've had a lot of success," Procaccio said. "There might not be as many big names out there this year, but they're still from Villanova and they know what the Penn Relays are all about."

Some of the big question marks for the Wildcats' DMR team are the very people that might not know what the competition is all about — namely, the freshmen runners. Two of the four runners from last year's group will not be competing this year. Stephanie Schappert, a four-time All-American, graduated last spring, while another DMR veteran, Angel Piccirillo, is out of this year's competition due to a lingering injury.

Although the team was prepared to compete without Schappert this year, Piccirillo's injury could

be devastating. The Homer City, Pa., native had set the collegiate record in the 1,000m at the Big East Championships in February, and she finished second in the mile at the NCAA Championships last month.

Even scarier for the Villanova faithful is that Schappert and Piccirillo ran the first and last legs of the relay, which are the two longest and most important legs, as Procaccio explains.

"Both of those legs are crucial to the outcome," Procaccio said. "The leadoff leg essentially determines if you're going to be in the race at all, and the anchor is the person you want to bring it home when you have the lead at the last handoff."

The two freshmen in line to replace Piccirillo and Schappert on this year's team are Vancouver native Nicole Hutchinson and Ohio resident Sammy Bockover. The two girls raced head-to-head on Friday to see who would take on the responsibility of the anchor. The results of that race have not been made public.

Hutchinson and Bockover will likely join sophomore Siofra Cleirigh Buttner and senior Michaela Wilkins, the two runners returning from last year's group. Regardless of who runs the all-important anchor leg, Procaccio is not counting her inexperienced team out.

"I'm confident that we can still



COURTESY OF VILLANOVA ATHLETICS

After winning its fourth straight distance medley relay title, Villanova will be hard-pressed to make it a fifth consecutive win with an all-new lineup.

be competitive by the end of the race," Procaccio said. "There are some pretty impressive anchors coming to compete against our freshmen, we'll just have to see what happens."

One of the more distinguishing aspects of Procaccio's interview was that instead of expressing supreme confidence in her team's chances this year, she repeatedly referenced the future, which might catch the eyes of competitors

that think this could be the year the Wildcats' winning streak is broken. Procaccio did mention, however, that she was "excited to see what the freshmen can do" and that she believes the new runners are "ready for the competitive environment."

Read into it what you will, but one thing is for sure — if history tells us anything, come the final leg of the relay, the Wildcats will be right in the mix.

Making the Penn Relays a reality

Professional staff, volunteers run the show

DAVID FIGURELLI
Sports Reporter

The runners have taken their places. It's a beautiful, sunny Saturday in April, and the competitors are lined up in front of a crowd of over 40,000 at Franklin Field. For some, this may be the biggest race of their lives. The nerves are building, and the tension becomes thicker and thicker in the air.

Finally, the starting gun sounds.

For many track and field athletes — high school, college and professional — the Penn Relays are the one of the most prestigious and highly anticipated competitions of the year. More athletes compete in the Relays than the Olympics; with over 22,000 participants and in excess of 100,000 spectators over the course of three days, in addition to countless volunteer staff and security, it is undoubtedly the biggest Penn-sponsored event of the year.

But how is a spectacle of this magnitude produced? We know the athletes train year-round on the track and in the weight room, but so much more goes into the event than just the athletic training. Where do the athletes stay? How are tickets distributed? Which colleges and professionals come to compete? How is the event reported?

That's where the Penn Relays staff comes in. Though the vast majority of people working for the Relays are volunteers, a small contingent of Penn Athletics staff dedicates themselves to the event almost year round, and almost every one of them has at least a decade of experience.

In charge of it all is Director Dave Johnson. The upcoming Relays will be Johnson's 21st as director, though had plenty of experience with the Relays before assuming his current position; the first year he ever worked with the Relays was 1978.

As director, Johnson has a stake in all of the different logistical aspects of the Relays — from ticketing to security to press coverage, he must be aware of the workings of every

department, as one might expect. Moreover, Johnson is ultimately in charge of troubleshooting event-wide issues.

"You get hit with odd questions and you find out all sorts of weird things," he said. "I've had to learn about all sorts of things I thought I had no interest in — Philadelphia traffic patterns, railroad work on SEPTA lines, the effect of the Philadelphia Flower Show on the Relays — just seeing how all sorts of pieces of the city interrelate."

“ Luckily, as an event, we have a lot of loyalty. People enjoy coming here and working here.”

- Gail Zachary, assistant director

Issues that come up vary widely in size and scope. Sometimes the challenges are of the more normal variety, such as issues with result accuracy or inclement weather. Other times, however, one change of plans on the other side of the city can affect the entire Relays. For example, a flight cancellation one year meant that Johnson and the rest of the Penn staff had to organize extra hotel arrangements for a group of teams from the Carolinas, the cost of which had to be partially covered by the Relays.

One of the biggest challenges of the job, however, is dealing with the sheer number of people that are involved in the Relays. Most of the events happening at Penn fit within the Penn bubble. The Relays, however, meet a much wider audience and are contingent upon the participation of so many people outside of the Penn community for which Johnson is ultimately responsible.

"Because it's a public event, my constituency group is not internal like it is for coaches or administrators. It's out in the rest of the world," he said. "A coach has other coaches within the sport that are their peer group; they're responsibility group is more restrained. My responsibility group is the volunteers, the officials, the coaches, the spectators — everyone. I'm reaching outside the track and field

community and Penn community more than I am internally."

Joining Johnson are Assistant Director Gail Zachary and Staff Assistant Norm Lieberman. Like Johnson, both Zachary and Lieberman have decades of experience and have duties that expand over nearly every facet of the Relays, from settling contracts with hotels throughout Philadelphia to making sure there is adequate lodging for athletes and spectators to making sure officials are in the right places at the right times.

"With the Relays, I'm involved in basically every stage. I have a concept of what our hospitality crew is doing, what's happening with catering, dealing with colleges and their requests. Ticketing, fee collecting, apparel and uniforms, so coordinating everything to make sure everything is where we need to be when Thursday morning arrives," Zachary said.

While the staff is in charge of the planning and coordinating of all of these aspects of the events, they ultimately rely on volunteers to do their jobs on the ground. Other than paid workers, which involve security, officials, police, vendors, etc., the Penn Relays rely on about 600 volunteers each year to come and make sure everything runs smoothly.

"Luckily, as an event, we have a lot of loyalty," Zachary said. "People enjoy coming here and working here. It's almost like a once-a-year reunion for the officials and the fans and the athletes. So it's important to a lot of different people."

An event with the prestige and scope of the Penn Relays obviously attracts a lot of media attention. Enter Chas Dorman.

Dorman, entering his ninth year working for the event, is the associate director of Penn's athletic communications department and acts as the media relations coordinator for the Penn Relays. With over 400 local, regional and national journalists coming to cover the event, the Penn Relays are easily Dorman's biggest event of the year.

"The biggest challenge is staying engaged over the entire

length of the race days," Dorman said. "We've got races from 10 AM till 11:30 PM if everything is on schedule, which means I need to be here at around 5:30 AM to set up the media room, so we have to be ready and chipper and happy at 6 AM. If the races are on schedule, then I leave at 1 AM, and then we do it all over again the next day. There are years that we've started races at 1 AM. But journalists are here to cover these events, so we have to have the media room available."

The biggest thing that Dorman stresses, however, is the spectacle of the Relays. Some athletes are high schoolers for whom this will be the biggest event of their careers; others are prospective Olympians whose performance at the Relays could affect their inclusion in the Games. All of this divides one large competition into many small segments, each segment being the most important of the Relays for someone there.

"We have Olympians, we have high schoolers, we have World Champions and we have 95 year olds. There's so much going on that every time the starting gun goes off, that's a big moment for those people, so there's no down time," Dorman said. "Along with that, there are media members here who don't cover an ounce of track. They're here to engage with the fans and show off the cultural aspect of this event, to document what this experience is like for everyone."

“ That's one of the biggest things I learned early in my time with the Relays. This isn't just a track meet.”

- Chas Dorman, associate director of athletic communications

"That's one of the biggest things I learned early in my time with the Relays. This isn't just a track meet. So I have to know how I can help them cover that too."

This sentiment is echoed by Dipen Shah, who graduated from Penn as part of the Class of 2000 and is in charge of technology for

the Relays. Shah started working for the Relays as a work-study job when he was enrolled and has been involved with the event ever since. With the volume of races that occurring over the course of the event, Shah has been working year after year to improve computer interface to condense results and make them more easily available to the public. When the timers send the results to Shah and his staff, it only takes an extra tenth of a second for the times to go online once they appear on the scoreboard.

Furthermore, the data is grouped on an easy to use website that groups competitors and schools by event and by region, making it easier than ever for fans and journalists to get the information they want about a certain competitor or team. Over the past few years, they've included quote and picture features that are tagged with each team and individual, adding to the fan-friendly experience of the Relays. Over the three days, the system receives about a terabyte of just photo data, or close to 35,000 pictures.

"The original goal of the program was to collect data for teams so that journalists could more easily find a story to write about," Shah said. "We have information broken down by conference, by state, by region, so that all of the different media members that are here can more easily find a story that relates to them. But at the end of the day, we're trying make this a better experience for the athletes and the fans."

One sentiment that was shared by everyone on the staff was the sense of community that comes with working on the Relays. With almost every position being volunteer, people contribute their time to the event because they love it.

"They come, they spend their time, and they work hard," Shah said. "Those are the people that really make it all come together."

For the fans and the athletes, the Penn Relays are more than just another track and field competition. It's one of the biggest events of the year, not just at Penn but in all of Philadelphia, and it shows in the passion with which the Relay staff works.

Relays through the years

