

# Athletes amped for T&F championships

## 1,300 STUDENTS SET TO COMPETE AT PROVINCIALS

By: Jason Bell

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Arunima Rajapakse dove to make a fine save and got a swift boot to the hand while playing goalkeeper for the Fort Richmond Centurions girls soccer squad a few weeks back.

The resulting broken finger is still tightly wrapped.

But the talented multi-sport athlete anticipates much smoother sailing when she competes in the varsity girls long jump, triple jump and 4X100-metre relay events this weekend at the 2018 Manitoba high school track and field championships.

The three-day spring sports celebration — with about 1,300 athletes from over 120 schools competing — begins Thursday morning and wraps up late Saturday when team championship banners will be awarded.

Rajapakse, 17, who faces her first test late Thursday afternoon in the long-jump event qualifying, said a busted digit will be neither a hindrance nor a distraction when she begins her quest for a personal best.

"It hasn't affected me that much in training because my focus is on jumping and my hands don't really play a huge part in it," she said during a Manitoba High Schools Athletic Association media conference held Tuesday at the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame (inside the Canada Games Sport for Life Centre).

"I did do the 100-metre race for our zone meets and it was hard getting into the blocks (for the start), it was pretty uncomfortable. So, my main focus is the jumps."

The Grade 11 student, who moved to Canada from Sri Lanka when she was a toddler, was introduced to track and field events four years ago at Acadia Junior High. Running, she readily admitted, isn't her favourite thing but is a means to an end in her chosen disciplines.

"The jumping is the fun part," said Rajapakse. "It's the feeling that you get when you're in the air. It's a special feeling. It's different from races, too, because you have time to think about what you can do better. For long jump and triple jump, you get three chances or six chances, where in a race you only get one chance."

A place on the medals podium is certainly within reach, however, eclipsing her personal best marks of 10.53 metres for triple jump and 4.90 metres for long jump remains the primary goal.

"It would be nice to get on the podium but I don't want to put too many expectations," she said. "This is a chance for me to improve myself and see where I am against all the other athletes in Manitoba."

Centurions' track and field coach Ben Hodges said while the high school championships are a momentous weekend for young athletes — particularly those in their graduating year — placings and medal colours shouldn't be the measuring stick this weekend.

"Most of these kids have been training for this since November. The very first day you talk about the end result, making it to provincials. It's like the finish line for them, a chance to prove themselves and show off what they can do," Hodges said. "But we're a sport of personal bests, and if they can best themselves that's awesome. They've trained to peak right now, so it'll be awesome to see what happens."

The championships are the largest outdoor meet held each year in Manitoba. Track events include the 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1,500m and 3,000m, along with 80m and 100m hurdles and 4X100m and 4X400m relays. Field events include javelin, shot put, discus, high jump, long jump and trip jump.

The pentathlon, which was introduced in 2017, is, perhaps, the championships' showcase event. Athletes are challenged to tackle the 100m, long jump, high jump, shot put and the 800m over three days, earning points along the way.

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Sisler's Cassius Meeches is the reigning varsity boys gold medallist, but Kelvin's Max Speiser is expected to be in the mix — even though he is relatively new to the disciplines of shot put and long jump.

"It hasn't been easy but my coaches have really helped me with the learning process," said Speiser, 17. "Now I'm at the point where I'm used to everything. When I'm training, I'm practising five days a week because it's so many events.

"Over my three years of high-jump training, there are lots of very technical aspects. So, when I started training for the new events a few months ago I would focus only on getting my techniques proper. I wouldn't focus on the numbers I would get. The results didn't matter. But recently in the meet leading up to the provincials, that's when I've just gone for it and hoped my technique and muscle memory would stay there. I've surprised myself."

As part of the MHSAA's inclusive initiatives, 100m, 200m and shot put events have been added for students with intellectual disabilities to be able to represent their schools.

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### **Jason Bell**

*Assistant sports editor*

Jason Bell wanted to be a lawyer when he was a kid. The movie *The Paper Chase* got him hooked on the idea of law school and, possibly, falling in love with someone exactly like Lindsay Wagner (before she went all bionic).

[Read full biography](#)

## **Thursday, June 7 to Saturday June 9**

University of Manitoba Stadium

The 411

Approximately 1,300 high school athletes (junior varsity and varsity) representing 120 schools will be competing in 70 events.

### Timetable

Day 1 (Thursday) 12:15 p.m. to 8 p.m. Highlights of the day include: all 1,500-metres finals (2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.); the medley relays (6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.); qualifying in all field events (long jump, shot put, javelin, high jump) all day.

Day 2 (Friday) 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Highlight of the day include: all 100m finals (1:50 p.m. to 2:05 p.m.); all 4X400m finals (6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.); field qualifying, varsity boys high jump final (11:15 a.m.); varsity girls high jump final (1:15 p.m.); varsity boys and girls javelin, long jump, shot put finals (5:15 p.m., 6:30 p.m.)

Day 3 (Saturday): 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Highlights of the day include: all 400m finals (12:15 p.m. to 12:30 p.m.); all 800m finals (1:45 p.m. to 2 p.m.); all 200m finals (2:20 p.m. to 2:35 p.m.); all 800m for pentathlon (3:15 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.); all 4X100m finals (4 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.); awards presentations (4:30 p.m.).

### Ones to watch

Junior varsity boys — Graham Hutchinson-Campbell, Glenlawn (100m, 200m, triple jump); Daxx Turner, Neepawa (javelin, high jump, triple jump); William Boyle, Garden City (1,500m, 3,000m); Trae Tomlinson, St. Paul's (100m, 200m, long jump); Zach Veitch, Rivers (shot put, javelin, discus).

Varsity boys — Ben Perrett, Neepawa (200m, 400m, 800m); Jordan Soufi, Miles Macdonell (100m, 200m); Timothy Juvonen, Lord Selkirk (long jump, triple jump); Matt Indome, St. Paul's (100m, 200m, long jump); Max Speiser, Kelvin (high jump, pentathlon); Markus Rurangirwa, Fort Richmond (long jump, triple jump, high jump), Josh Samyn, Shaftesbury (800m, 1,500m, javelin); Cassius Meeches, Sisler (pentathlon).

Junior varsity girls — Ceci Howes, Kelvin (1,500m, 3,000m, medley relay); Paige Heide, Steinbach (80m hurdles, 800 1,500m); Ilona Zyrini, Vincent Massey (Wpg) (400m, 800m); Rofiat Agboola, Kelvin (200m, triple jump, 4X400m relay medley relay).

Varsity girls — Tracy Towns, Shaftesbury (400m, 800m, 1,500m); Arunima Rajapakse, Fort Richmond (long jump, triple jump, 4X100m relay); Natalie Gundrum, Prairie Mountain-Somerset (long jump, triple jump, high jump); Erin Valgardson, Kelvin (1,500m, 3,000m, 4X400m relay); Brooklyn Knaggs, Alonsa (pentathlon).1

— Bell

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