

# Kelvin senior wins provincial 1,500-metre gold

VICTORY IN FINAL YEAR 'MEANS A LOT TO ME,' VALGARDSON SAYS

By: Jason Bell

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Erin Valgardson had sensed the second heat of the varsity girls 1,500-metre track event Thursday wouldn't be a walk in the park.

As it turned out, it was exactly the type of race the Kelvin High School runner anticipated — and craved.

She and Shaftesbury athlete Tracy Towns pulled away from the pack midway through the heat, trading the lead before Valgardson shot ahead with about 250 metres to go.

Valgardson posted the fastest time (four minutes 49.82 seconds) of two heats to win the event at the 2018 Manitoba high school track and field championships, just a fraction of a second ahead of Towns (4:50.65). Simone Crevier of Portage (5:09.42) finished third.

"This means a lot to me. It feels really special doing this in my Grade 12 year," Valgardson, 18, said. "I didn't know what to expect just because I haven't had the best season.

"I went through a bit of an injury (calf muscle) at the beginning of May, so my training's been a bit off lately. I was still running every day, but not to the intensity I should be running at. So, that was a minor setback, but I pushed through."

The 1,500m distance was one of the few events with finals Thursday. Most are set for today and Saturday at the U of M track.

Margarett Watt of Garden City prevailed in the junior varsity girls 1,500m final (4:56.45), while Kelvin's Ceci Howes finished second (4:58.95) and Erin Owens of Portage was third (4:59.21). In JV boys, William Boyle (4:15.70) edged Garden City schoolmate Joshua Gonzalez (4:16.32), while Justin Kroeker of Edward Schreyer (4:17.77) placed third. And in the varsity boys 1,500m, Jack Taylor of St. Paul's clocked in at 4:14.02 to win, while Noel Kendle of Kelvin (4:16.64) was runner-up and Dawson Mann of Sanford (4:17.01) was third.

Towns was always going to be her toughest rival on the University of Manitoba outdoor track, Valgardson said.

"There was a bit of wind, so my coach told me to try and sit on someone so they could take the wind, and through 700 metres with 800 to go just pick it up and push the pace. I knew she was right behind me and I didn't want to kick too early. I was a bit surprised she passed me but it was a good surprise," Valgardson said. "I'm glad she did, because it really pushed me to go for it and gave me that much more motivation.

"It was more of a tactical race because of the conditions. Having the wind, it takes a lot out of you. If you're able to sit on someone and let them do the work, that's always the best."

Valgardson, a member of the Winnipeg Optimists track club, still has one exam left, but will graduate from Kelvin later this month. She'll begin a new stage of her athletic career this fall at North Dakota State University with the school's NCAA Division I track team.

She's not going to Fargo, N.D., alone. Optimists clubmate Josh Samyn, 17, a Grade 12 student at Shaftesbury, will also run for the NDSU Bisons this fall.

Valgardson and Samyn are the lone Manitobans to earn U.S. track and field scholarships this year.

"I went there on a school visit (prior to Christmas) and instantly fell in love with the campus. The coaches were all super welcoming, and they really wanted to make sure I felt home and I could adapt to the big change. I instantly felt a connection there, and knew inside that's where I wanted to go," she said. "And it's close to home, so that's a bonus."

Running was just a fun way to burn off some energy in grades 9 and 10 — but things got real a year ago, she said.

"Coaches from universities started contacting me and it was like, 'Wow, I could actually do this.' It's a really good feeling, because they were noticing all the hard work I put in. It wasn't just my parents and my coach who were believing me," Valgardson said.

Her focus during the U.S. college competitive season will be on the 800-metre, 1,500-metre and longer runs, making her somewhat of a glutton for punishment.

"The 1,500 is definitely a tough one, but that's why I like it. It's hard, but it's one of my favourites," she said. "You need the speed and the endurance, and it can also be a really technical race... very hard on you mentally, too. It's a challenge."

Valgardson will also compete this weekend in the varsity girls' 3,000m event, set for at 9:40 a.m. Saturday morning, the final day of the high school track and field championships.

Samyn, meanwhile, pulled out of the varsity boys 1,500m Thursday to preserve stamina for his specialty, the 800m event. He'll run a heat today, and should easily qualify for Saturday's final at 2 p.m.

The plan this weekend, he said, is to attempt to go out in record-setting style.

"I'm hoping to break the provincial (high school) record, or at least try. I'm going to go for that," he said. "I'm close in the times. My best time I ran last year, which is 1:54.10, so I'm a second off."

The provincial high school record is 1:53.08, set 17 years ago by Eric Sproll of St. Paul's. Most challenging for Samyn will be the likely absence of any objects in his rear-view mirror.

"I'll be out there by myself, because no one will be pacing me in the race, no one's going to be going that quick, so it will be tough," he said.

Samyn was a talented multi-sport athlete, but trimmed the others away to concentrate on middle-distance running. In Grade 11, the struggle to juggle hockey and track produced a painful hamstring injury.

"As you move on in your life, you start to focus more. So, sadly, I've cut down on other sports to specialize on what I want to do in track," he said. "It's the big step going on to NDSU... great school, great opportunity. At the NCAA level, I'll be a small fish in an even bigger pond, so I'm excited to run and train with better athletes than me to elevate my capabilities."

NDSU is also the alma mater of Winnipegger and 2016 Olympian Erin Teschuk, a highly decorated university athlete in long-distance events.

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Andrew Carlson, the NDSU track and field team's distance coach, sees some similarities in the styles of Teschuk and Valgardson — and not only their first names.

"Their high school personal bests (times) are so very similar, and their training backgrounds are much alike. (Valgardson) has such a tremendous endurance background. We're excited to see her trajectory," he said.

"She and Josh are such talented kids, and we're excited to have them both. Josh is a speed-based athlete, so it will be fun to see where he fits into that middle distance.

"No one's an overnight success in college sports. But we work with our athletes to make sure they build to become the exceptional athletes they can be in their time with us."

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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](#)

## HISTORY

Updated on Friday, June 8, 2018 at 1:26 PM CDT: corrects name of school in cutline

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