

Athlete Profile
Alysia Johnson

By Nicole Moreno

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Alysia Johnson has excelled as a track and field athlete at the University of California, Berkeley since 2004. Since then she has improved her 800-meter time by 10 seconds, dropping it to a career best and school-record of 1 minute, 59.29 seconds while winning the 2007 NCAA Division I outdoor 800m title at Sacramento's Hornet Stadium. Her time was also the second fastest in NCCA I Championship history behind Suzy Favor's 1:59.11 (1990).

Last March, Johnson won her first NCAA title with a Cal indoor record of 2:03.47 at the NCAA Indoor Championships in Fayetteville, Ark. Since then, the Cal Junior



Alysia Johnson (right)

Photo: Chris Putman / GoldenBearSports.com

standout won a USA Track & Field national 800m crown with a time of 1:59:47 at the 2007 AT&T USA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Indianapolis, Ind.

Johnson's win qualified her for a spot on the U.S. team that will compete at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Osaka, Japan, August 25-September 2.

"It was a wonderful feeling. We aimed all year for that," said Johnson.

Tony Sandoval, Cal's veteran track and field and cross country coach, worked with Johnson on her strength, speed, and form this year. They incorporated more weight training and hill work. Treadmill running was used to hone gait and form, incorporating hill intervals into 40 to 50 minute workouts. Sandoval kept Johnson's focus on the big meets.

Johnson's demeanor is definitely noticeable on the track. Behind a playful and giggly manner lies a calm, but strikingly competitive, drive.

After Johnson completes her Senior year competing for Cal Berkley, she plans on making running a career. If she falls short of her athletic ambitions, she has an alternative.

"I like to act. I would pursue a career in the theater arts," said Johnson.

But the 5-foot, 7-inch 21-year-old's true passion is running. After all, her track and field career began when she was only five years old. Johnson ran track with her cousins and her brother, Eric Johnson II.

"It was very non-competitive," said Johnson. "I grew up in a house full of boys. All we did was run 100 meters."

At Canyon High School (Canyon Country, Calif.), Johnson embraced the competitive environment and began to shine. She was the California state champion in the 800m run, and she earned three high school regional championship titles. Johnson was also the Santa Clarita Athlete of the Year in 2004 as a high school Senior. She also lettered in cross country and soccer. Johnson only lost once on the high school track. The defeat came in a 100-meter dash that she attempted minutes after she won an 800m race.

Johnson related that much of her high school success was because her coaches cared about her and her teammates.

"They didn't work us like horses. They knew if they did it would ruin the longevity of runners," said Johnson.

Johnson immediately adapted to collegiate competition as a Cal Bear. During her Freshmen year, she earned NCAA All-American honors at 800 meters. Johnson also had a team-high 400-meter time of 54:08, which was set at the Big Meet. This time placed her number 8 on Cal's all-time top 10 list.

In the summer of 2006, Johnson won her first international title. She took home the gold at the North American, Central American, and Caribbean (NACAC) Under 23 Championship.

Johnson's family has been supportive of her competitive drive since the beginning. Her brother and cousins have always kept her competitive. When Johnson broke the Cal 800m school record for the first time, her grandmother, age 96, was present.

"I feel privileged. A lot of people don't have people out there to support them," said Johnson.

Besides training, Johnson likes to spend her time playing video games, hanging out with friends, skateboarding, snowboarding, and watching extreme sports. Traveling and meeting new people are two of the reasons she loves track and field.

Johnson will keep laughing her way to new heights. Her playful spirit complements her hard training. She approaches her sport with optimism, and competes with a flower in her hair—a Johnson trademark.

"Make sure everything you're doing, you have fun doing it," said Johnson.

As long as track and field remains fun for Alysia Johnson, that's surely a good sign.