

Hundreds compete at youth track meet in SB

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Claire Graves, 13, of Highland, finished first in the Girls 1600 meter race. (Gabriel Luis Acosta/Staff Photographer)

Photo Gallery: [Hershey's Track & Field Games](http://photos.sbsun.com/2012/06/socal-hersheys-track-field-finals-in-san-bernardino/) (<http://photos.sbsun.com/2012/06/socal-hersheys-track-field-finals-in-san-bernardino/>)

SAN BERNARDINO - Some of the top young track and field athletes in the country on Saturday competed against the best runners, jumpers and throwers from the city on Saturday at San Gorgonio High School.

For the 35th straight year, hundreds of 9- to 14-year-olds battled at the Southern California finals of the Hershey's Track & Field Games.

The top finisher in each age category qualified for the Western region - representing California, Hawaii, Nevada, Arizona and Utah - and a shot at the national championship in Hershey, Penn.



Myles Simmons, 14, of Pasadena, competes in the long jump. (Gabriel Luis Acosta/Staff Photographer)

Local athletes said they were ready to test themselves against the region's best.

"I've been running since the first grade," said Penny Hayes, 11, of Apple Valley. "I just really like running, and I think I might have a chance to make it this year."

Penny was competing in the 100-meter dash and 4X100-meter relay Saturday, although her parents said she branched out at other times.

"She trains year-round," said her mother, Donna Hayes. "She does cross country in fall, just a lot of running. She loves it though, and as long as she does we'll support her."

The top three in their age group for each event qualified for Saturday's meet, said Ann Kassel-Wilkes, who is the Southern California chairwoman for the Hershey's track and field organization and is also community recreation programs director for the city of San Bernardino.

"There are a lot of really good athletes here today," Kassel-Wilkes said. "We're having a good meet."

More than 500 athletes registered for the event, she said, estimating that about 20 were students from the San Bernardino City Unified School District.

One of those was Desiree Morales, 10, a student at Roosevelt Elementary School.

"We run at school," said Desiree, who was scheduled to run the 200-meter Saturday. "I like it."

More than 50 volunteers helped run the meet, which includes running events up to 1600 meters - just under a mile - along with the standing long jump and softball throw.

That event, a less stressful version of the shot put found at other events, attracted Jakob Simmons, 9, of Apple Valley.

"It was good," said Jakob. "I usually play baseball, so that helped."

The Hershey's Track and Field Games is the largest youth sports program of its kind in North America, according to the organization's website.

It is largely funded by Hershey's, the chocolate company.

The organization was started in 1978, and San Bernardino was one of the first cities to sign on, according to Kassel-Wilkes.

"We've done it all 35 years," she said. "It's a great way to represent the city."

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Read more: http://www.sbsun.com/ci_20823768/hundreds-compete-at-youth-track-meet-sb?IADID=Search-www.sbsun.com-www.sbsun.com#ixzz1xV5sVhDG