

## TRACK

### Girls track and field: North Jersey's 25 best athletes of the last 25 years



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From the 2000-01 winter season through the spring of 2025, North Jersey girls won 81 gold medals at the State Meet of Champions and 343 individual state group championships in the winter and spring track and field seasons.

They also set 46 of 60 individual Bergen and Passaic records.

Whew!

That's why, when choosing the best track and field athletes of the past 25 years, it would be a disservice to pick just one for each event. Since these selections go across both seasons, we decided to pick the 25 top athletes regardless of event, though every event is represented on this list.

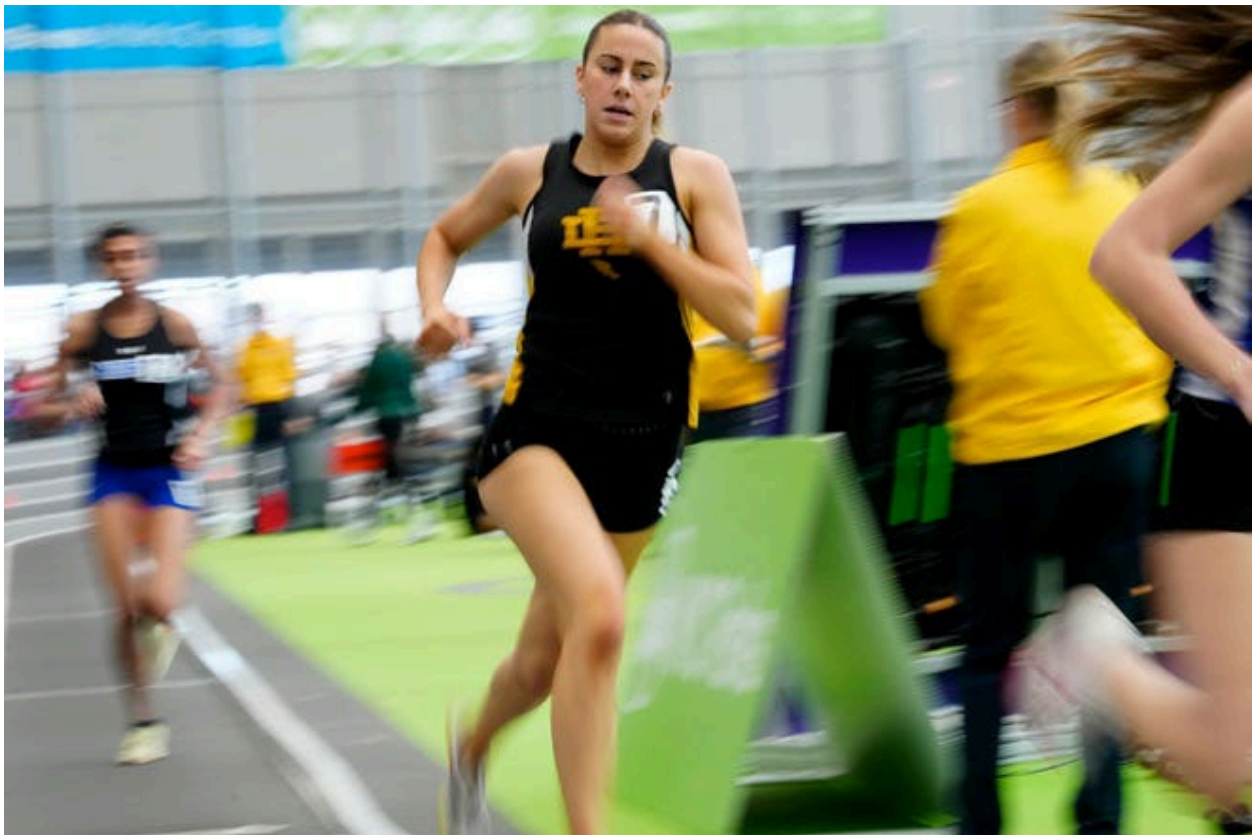
The criteria considered were, in order of importance: Performance at the SMOC (multiple gold medals earned extra credit), performance at state groups (gold medals were essential), other major meet titles, and times at major championships. Performances at various national meets were considered as tiebreakers.

### **Amber Allen**

#### **Passaic Tech long sprinter/hurdler, Class of 2010**

No one had a bigger smile while competing than Amber Allen, and few were as successful at both the 400 and 400 hurdles at a high level. She won only two state group titles, both in the open 400, but saved her best races for the State Meet of Champions, where she won back-to-back 400 hurdles titles titles, one of just seven girls to accomplish the feat.

She also took home seven other SMOC medals and finished third or better in all but two of her SMOC races. She went on to be an All-American at the University of South Carolina and finished her college career as an All-Big East performer at St. John's.



### **Christina Allen**

#### **River Dell middle distance, Class of 2024**

Allen is one of only two runners in state history to win both the 800 and 3,200 at the SMOC, winning the 3,200 in one of the most memorable finishes in state history as a freshman in 2021 and winning the 800 the following year.

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She probably was better at the 1,600 than any other event but "managed" only four SMOC medals, including a second-place finish in 2023. She won seven group titles and led her team to two indoor state titles and five sectional crowns with unselfish performances. She is entering her sophomore year at the University of Cincinnati.

### **Tiffany Bautista**

#### **Paramus Catholic jumper/sprinter, Class of 2019**

Bautista had one of the most memorable meets at the State Meet of Champions her junior year, winning the high jump and triple jump, and anchoring the Paladins' first-place 4-x-100 relay. She missed a fourth gold medal by fewer than four inches in the long jump.

She looked to be on pace to replicate the feat the next year, but was injured during the indoor season. She returned to competition that spring and won several group titles, bringing her total to seven, but was never quite the same. She went on to jump at Columbia and North Carolina but never beat her high-school bests.

### **Cheyenne Bellerand**

#### **Emerson thrower, Class of 2014**

Until Bellerand came along, only one North Jersey Group 1 girl had ever placed in the State Meet of Champions shot put, and only two had placed in the discus. By the time she graduated, Bellerand won both the indoor shot and outdoor discus, becoming just North Jersey's second Group 1 SMOC champion in the throws.

She also won three group titles and earned two other SMOC medals. She went on to throw for four years at Howard University.

### **Janine Davis**

### **Queen of Peace 400/800, Class of 2005**

No one in North Jersey history has won more group titles or State Meet of Champions titles than Davis, who could run anything from 100 meters to a mile with great success. She won seven indoor and seven outdoor group titles and had five SMOC wins, two outdoors and two indoors at 800 meters and a fifth one at 400 indoors, putting up a rare SMOC double in 2004.

She set the national indoor record at 600 meters in 2005, which stood for a decade, and she became a multiple time All-American at Texas and Arkansas.



### **Abigail Dennis**

#### **Old Tappan hurdler/sprinter, Class of 2024**

[Millions watched her mom's viral video of Dennis' comeback](#) from a fall to win her county 110 hurdles trials during her sophomore year. But Abby Dennis was much more than a TikTok sensation.

She won six group titles in hurdles and sprints, became Bergen County's first-ever sub-60 400-hurdler and won a pair of SMOC titles in the 100-meter high hurdles. She brought

home six other SMOC medals and earned indoor All-American status. She is now a sophomore at Harvard.

### **Jessica Fazekas**

#### **Demarest thrower, Class of 2002**

The older of the two sisters who lifted North Jersey throwing to a higher level early in the 21st Century, Jessica won an indoor state title in the shot put and an outdoor crown in the discus the following year.

Before Jessica came on the scene, only one North Jersey girl had thrown more than 140 feet in the discus and no one had thrown past 45 feet in the shot put in the first 30 years of high school girls track. Jessica went on to compete for Boston College.

### **Kelly Fazekas**

#### **Demarest thrower, Class of 2003**

North Jersey has been blessed with a plethora of great throwers but none were better than the Fazekas sisters. They battled against the throwers in the state but the competition may have been fiercest when they faced each other.

Kelly won outdoor and an indoor SMOC titles in the shot put and earned three other SMOC medals in the shot and discus. She also was a three-time indoor All-American in the shot. The sisters shared the Bergen County record in the shot for eight years. Kelly went on to throw at North Carolina.

### **Mariah Fede**

#### **Paramus Catholic sprinter/hurdler, Class of 2020**

Fede was among the athletes whose careers were cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. She still managed to win a SMOC 200 title indoors but was unable to add to her four group titles and collection of seven total SMOC medals, which included two seconds and two thirds.

She might well have become the first Bergen girl to go under 14 seconds in the 100 hurdles and 60 seconds in the 400 hurdles, achieved later by Grace O'Shea and Abby Dennis. Fede went on to run at Northeastern and at MacPherson College in Kansas, where she won a conference championship.

### **Layla Giordano**

#### **Old Tappan thrower, Class of 2024**



Giordano played volleyball on a state-championship team in the fall and was a very good basketball player in the winter. But when the calendar turned to spring, Giordano found her niche. There's no question she's the greatest discus thrower in North Jersey history, taking the county record from 144 feet to 172-2 en route to two SMOC titles, a national crown and third place on the all-time state list.

She remains North Jersey's only 50-foot thrower in the shot, an SMOC and All-American in that event, and the fourth-longest thrower in state history. She'll be a sophomore at Princeton next year, already ranking third in the school's list for the discus.



### **Myasia Jacobs**

#### **Paramus Catholic sprinter, Class of 2012**

Only one New Jersey girl has ever won either the 100 or 200 three times in the history of the State Meet of Champions dating back to its inception in 1974. Jacobs won both the SMOC 100 and 200 each of her first three years in high school. She likely would have completed the quadruple but suffered an injury at sectionals her senior year.

Jacobs won an indoor 55 SMOC title and 10 state group titles. She still holds the Bergen County records at 55, 100 and 200 meters and was named All-American six times. She went on to run collegiately at Georgia and Clemson.

### **Emma Keating**

#### **Pompton Lakes pole vault, Class of 2023**

Keating didn't start pole vaulting seriously until the winter of her junior year. Eighteen months later, she owned three SMOC titles in the vault and added a fourth SMOC medal.

Coached by her dad, Steve, the former Passaic County boys record holder, she was also a fine hurdler and high jumper, much like her mom, the former Anne Bansemeir, who was a star hurdler at Nutley and later Rutgers. Emma is entering her junior at Rutgers and continues to excel.

### **Kim Mineo**

#### **Glen Rock middle distance/hurdles, Class of 2003**

She wasn't the fastest to ever run the distance (she ranks 16th all-time in Bergen County history), but no one was more competitive. She was probably the underdog in each SMOC 800 race she ran, and became just the second girl in state history to go back-to-back-to-back in the event.

Her toughness and talent earned her six group championships in the 800 and 400 hurdles, possibly the two most challenging races on the track. She loved soccer and went on to play the sport for four years at Rutgers.

### **Corinne Myers**

#### **Westwood middle distance, Class of 2014**

After placing second in the indoor 800 in 2013, Myers made sure not to let Olivia Baker (Columbia HS) win the 400-800 double the following year. Bolting from the gun as if it was a 400-meter race, she ran the legs off of Baker, who had less than 45 minutes to prepare after her 400 win over a very young Sydney McLaughlin.

Myers went on to finish third at Indoor Nationals and dominated the event in the spring, setting a Bergen County record that still stands. She went on to run at Northeastern, where she won a conference title.

### **Josette Norris**

#### **Tenaflly middle distance/distance, Class of 2014**

Norris spent her first two winters playing basketball at Tenafly before committing full-time to running. She won the 2013 SMOC 1,600 outdoors title in a meet record that lasted 12 years and is still the Bergen County record. She won five group titles and had three other top SMOC finishes, despite an injury that cost us a good chunk of her senior year.

She started her college career at North Carolina and finished as an All-American at Georgetown. Now married to former Olympian Robbie Andrews of Manalapan, Norris is one of America's all-time top runners from 1,500 to 5,000 meters, and is an Olympic and World championship contender.



**Grace O'Shea**

#### **Ramapo hurdles/sprints, Class of 2019**

After transferring back home from Montclair Kimberley after her freshman year, O'Shea made history with a talent and ferocious work ethic that inspired those that watched her compete. She pulled off a surprise win in the indoor SMOC 55 hurdles as a junior and followed it up outdoors with a third place in the 110 hurdles outdoors.



A disastrous fall the next winter cost her a repeat title but inspired her to put together an amazing outdoor season in which she became North Jersey's first ever sub-14 high hurdler. She won her an outdoor SMOC title and earned All-American status at Nationals. She went on to run at the University of Pennsylvania.

### **Angelina Perez**

#### **Lakeland distance, Class of 2022**

Perez dominated the 3,200 and two-mile distances like no runner in state history and was the first New Jersey girl to go below 10 minutes both indoors and outdoors, winning a pair of indoor state titles and one outdoor crown.

In 2022, she won the New Balance indoor national title at two miles and earned All-America honors another time. She won five group titles and holds all of Passaic County's records at 1,600 meters and above. After starting college at the University of Florida, she transferred to Wake Forest, where she has regained her high school form.

### **Theresa Picciallo**

#### **Immaculate Heart thrower, Class of 2012**

Six weeks before she won her fourth straight SMOC shot put title (two indoors and two outdoors), it appeared as if her high school career was over. A painful elbow injury derailed her chance at a Penn Relays title (though she did finish second) and she only had two throws before dramatically coming from behind to win that title.

Three days later, she had surgery on that elbow. She went on to compete at UPenn and is now an award-winning director and producer.

### **Daina Pucurs**

#### **Demarest javelin, Class of 2004**

Pucurs held the Bergen County record for more than 20 years and has four of the top six throws in North Jersey history, ranking fourth all-time among New Jersey throwers. Pretty good for someone whose primary sport was supposed to be volleyball.

While she was the state Player of the Year in volleyball in 2003 and played briefly at Duke, javelin was where she really made her mark. Despite never winning a group title, she won the 2004 SMOC with a huge throw, then won the High School National Championships two weeks later. At Duke, she reached the NCAA finals twice and was an All-American twice.



### **Jenna Rogers**

#### **Rutherford high jump/multi events, Class of 2020**

Rogers set Bergen County and state records in the high jump as a freshman and won a national championship with a national freshman record. All three records still stand.

Foot injuries limited her to just one SMOC title and three other top-three finishes though she won four group titles. She went on to jump at Nebraska, where she set school records in the indoor and outdoor high jump and earned first-team All-American honors six times. She is expected to jump at the U.S. National Championships in Eugene, Oregon on July 31-Aug. 3.

### **Kaitlin Salisbury**

#### **Hawthorne sprinter/jumper, Class of 2016**

Salisbury first leapt into the spotlight as a sophomore when she and teammate Jenna Dyksen went 6-7 in the SMOC long jump, almost unheard of for small-school teammates. That was the last horizontal jump she lost to a New Jersey jumper in high school.

She swept the long and triple jumps in the next two Group 1 and SMOC meets and set a Passaic County record when she went 20 feet in the long jump. She also won the 100 and

200 in consecutive Group 1 championships. She won a total of 10 group golds including indoor meets, taking four other SMOC medals. She went on to excel at Bucknell and is now a coach there.

### **Casey Sullivan**

#### **Demarest thrower, Class of 2022**

It wasn't always a smooth ride for Sullivan, who missed her freshman track season due to injury and lost her sophomore spring to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But she battled through injuries and unprecedented circumstances to dominate New Jersey throwing her last two years, winning back-to-back SMOC titles in the shot put and four group titles, including a discus win. She also set a short-lived Bergen County record in the discus. She will be a senior at Wake Forest next year.

### **Shannon Sullivan**

#### **Immaculate Heart thrower, Class of 2009**

Another versatile thrower, Sullivan won a pair of SMOC titles and the 2009 National championship throwing the javelin. She won an indoor group title in the shot and placed fifth in the SMOC. She also threw the discus more than 120 feet and is one of the few throwers in the 300 club (combined shot, discus and javelin bests).

Sullivan went on to throw at Duke, where she won the ACC title in the javelin and was named an All-American honorable mention.



### **Tawana Watkins**

#### **Kennedy sprinter/hurdler, Class of 2002**

Watkins won six group titles and two of her five SMOC titles before this quarter century, and she missed her senior spring season with a stress fracture in her back that threatened her college career. But she did enough in the three winters and two springs of this time period to go down as one of the state's best.

She took the 2001 spring 400 and the 2001 and 2002 winter 400 state titles. Despite missing the states in the 400 hurdles in 2001 because of a disqualification, she won the national title that year with a then-state record. She still holds five Passaic County records and went on to earn multiple All-American honors at the University of South Carolina.

### **Niki Woods**

#### **Demarest javelin, Class of 2022**

Another of the versatile multi-sport athletes of the last 25 years, Woods was part of a state championship volleyball team but gravitated to the javelin for her next-level sport. S

he won back-to-back javelin championships and lost just once to a New Jersey athlete in her final two years. She now throws at Princeton, where she won the Penn Relays college division last year as a junior with a record throw that sits No. 3 on the Tigers' all-time list.

### **Best of the rest**

*\*denotes SMOC champion*

**Tami Adedeji**, DePaul 100/shot put/discus (2023)

**Kylie Castillo**, Ridgefield 200/400 (2024)

**Gina Certo**, Holy Angels 200/400 (2025)

**Alexandra Cimino**, Westwood 100 and 400 hurdles (2013)

**Isabelle Dely**, Paramus Catholic hurdles/long jump (2019)

**\*Lexi DelGizzo**, Tenafly 400/800 (2017)

**\*Shaunteriah Douglas**, Garfield javelin (2012)

**Aliana Eucker**, Bergen Tech/Westwood javelin (2021)

**\*Julia Guerra**, Indian Hills 1,600/3,200 (2016)

**Erin Henry**, Glen Rock 1,600/3,200 (2002)

**Jamie Kim**, Old Tappan pole vault (2025)

**\*Kristin Langan**, Wayne Hills pole vault (2015)

**Jesse Mizzzone**, Passaic Valley 3,200 (2003)

**Jessica Molina**, Westwood shot put and discus (2016)

**Anike Orimogunje**, Queen of Peace 100/200 (2003)

**Caroline O'Sullivan**, Old Tappan 800/1,600 (2018)

**\*Catherine Pagano**, Ridgewood/Northern Highlands 800/1,600 (2015)

**Sarah Pagano**, Immaculate Heart 1,600 and 3,200 (2009)

**\*Alana Pantale**, Wayne Valley shot put and discus (2010))

**Tatiyanna Sanders**, Paramus Catholic long and triple jumps (2014)

**Lyndsey Smith**, Eastern Christian sprints (2015)

**\*Michelle Smith**, Teaneck 100 and 400 hurdles (2005)



**Julia Sobilo**, Immaculate Heart discus (2025)

**Tyaja Thomas**, Paramus Catholic throws (2023)

**Kristen Traub**, Eastern Christian 1,600/3,200 (2012)

**\*Emily Urciuoli**, Clifton pole vault (2010)

#### **Honorable mention**

*\*denotes SMOC champion*

**Amarys Berry**, Hackensack (shot put); **Lauren Brzozowski**, Ramapo (long sprints); **\*Essence Carson**, Eastside (400); **\*Julia Cohan**, Northern Highlands (javelin); **Rae Corbo**, Paramus Catholic (jumps); **\*Taryn DeLeon**, Old Tappan (high jump); **Shannon Harnett**, Lakeland (high and triple jumps); **\*Shanai Heber**, Kennedy (triple jump); **\*Madison Holleran**, Northern Highlands (800); **\*Talia Hutchinson**, Ridgewood (pole vault); **Jessica Ippolito**, Fair Lawn (pole vault); **Jamie Klein**, Paramus Catholic (javelin); **\*Cat Light**, Demarest (discus); **Janay Mitchell**, Teaneck (sprints); **Jenna Monaco**, Dumont (pole vault, hurdles); **Gena Pickett**, Mahwah (triple jump); **\*Kayla Polcari**, Ridgewood (pole vault); **Melissa Purcell**, Pascack Valley (pole vault); **Alex Rosenberger**, Ramsey (400 hurdles/high jump); **Michelle Rubinetti**, Demarest (pole vault); **Lexi Samperi**, Hasbrouck Heights (long jump); **\*Lisa Sesnik-Clee**, Holy Angels (javelin); **Sarah Slowikowski**, Demarest (throws); **Lauren Stern**, Mahwah (jumps); **Takara Wilks**, Queen of Peace (55); **Sydney Woods**, Demarest (pole vault).