

Nia Akins Wins Frantic Women's 800 Meters as Fall Takes Out Olympic Champion Athing Mu

 dystat.com/gprofile.php

Folders

[Featured 1078](#)
[Misc News 369](#)
[John Dye Dual Meet Championship 11](#)
[Marc Bloom Stories 3](#)
[Dave Devine Stories 5](#)
[Webcast Info 141](#)
[News 716](#)
[Roads 44](#)
[Cross Country 124](#)
[Outdoor Track 411](#)

[GRAND SLAM TRACK™ Announces Signing of Team GB Olympian Josh Kerr as First U.K. "Racer"](#)

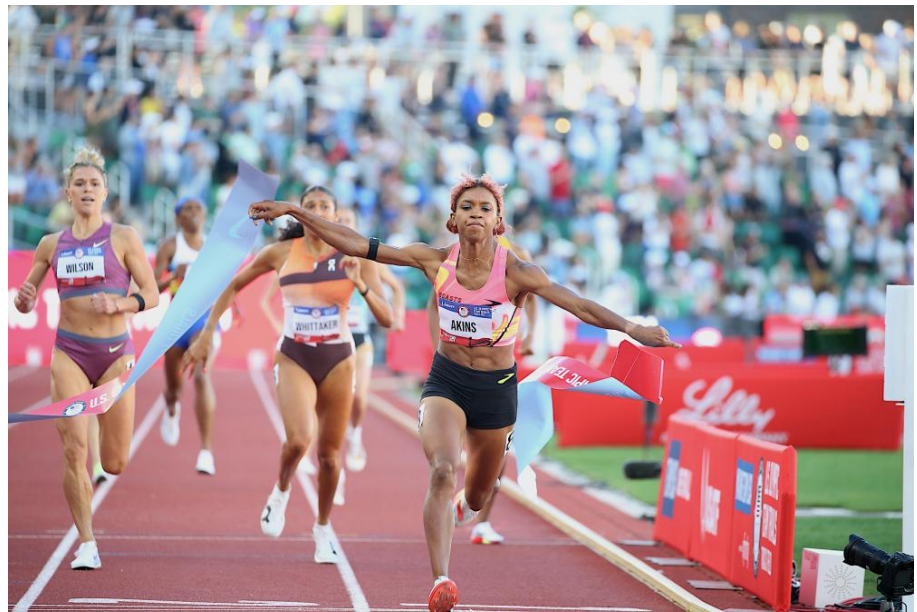
[Preview - 10 Storylines to Follow at Bell Track and Field Trials 2024](#)

[Left Behind: Some of America's Gold Medal Contenders Are 'Casualties' of Cutthroat First Weekend at U.S. Trials](#)

Published by



[DyeStat.com](https://dystat.com) Jun 25th 2024, 2:09am



Akins, Who Fell In 2021, Prevails In 1:57.36; Allie Wilson and Stanford's Juliette Whittaker Emerge Second and Third In Stacked Finals Field; St. Pierre, Cranny Neck and Neck For 1-2 Finish In 5,000

By Lori Shontz for DyeStat

John Nepolitan Photos

■ [Hocker, St. Pierre And Akins Claim U.S. Olympic Trials Titles - RRW](#)

■ [Nia Akins Wins Frantic Women's 800 Meters as Fall Takes Out Olympic Champion Athing Mu](#)

■ [Charity Hufnagel Halts Vashti Cunningham's High Jump Title Streak, Jeremiah Davis Wins Olympic Trials Long Jump Crown](#)

[Indoor Track 118](#)
[Athlete Features 78](#)
[Results 105](#)
[Rankings 95](#)
[Event Information/Entries/Heat Sheets 20](#)
[All 1543](#)

EUGENE – **Nia Akins** didn't see what happened, but she didn't need to. She knew how it felt.

All Akins knew, as she rounded the turn 200 meters into the women's 800-meter final Monday evening at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials, was that someone had fallen. "I was just tunnel vision," she said, "focused on just finishing the race."

The fallen competitor turned out to be defending Olympic gold medalist **Athing Mu**, who got tangled up in traffic and hit the track.

INTERVIEWS | PHOTOS

The rest of the exceptionally strong field kept going, and it was Akins – who herself had fallen in the Olympic Trials final three years ago – who made a move with 250 meters to go and won in a personal-best 1:57.36. She finished nearly a second ahead of runner-up **Allie Wilson**, who ran a season-best 1:58.32, and third-place **Juliette Whittaker**, the NCAA Division 1 indoor and outdoor champion from Stanford, who ran a personal-best 1:58.45.

While she was thrilled to make her first Olympic team, Akins couldn't help but think back to when she'd been the competitor lying on the track.

"I wouldn't be here today without what happened to me then," Akins said. "It took me a while, but I'm super grateful for it. Because I learned a lot from it.

"It sucked and it happens, but it helped me to grow a lot as a person, grow a lot in my faith and really trust Jesus more because you never know what's going to happen in life. Nothing's promised. And I don't deserve this win any more than anybody else did. It's just like a blessing. ... It's just life. It's unfair sometimes, then and now. Just unfair. It's a sport. Crazy and unpredictable."

The fall was the third consecutive in an Olympic Trials 800-meter final. Five years before Akins fell, in 2016, **Alysa Montaño** fell, **Brenda Martinez** got caught up in it and **Kate Grace** was the improbable winner.

Mu's fall is the most shocking. Even though she hadn't competed this season until the Trials because of a hamstring injury, she'd been considered a lock to make the team and a threat to defend her Olympic title. It's her face – along with 100-meter champion **Sha'Carri Richardson's** – that is on the Nike banners lining the security perimeter of Hayward Field.

It's hard to sort out exactly what happened. Mu tends to run at the front of the field, but she was in the middle of the pack on the backstretch, and it's possible that her long legs just got tangled up. She could have been clipped from behind; she may have made contact with **Raevyn Rogers**. Neither Mu nor Rogers were available to answer questions after the race.

"She was next to me, and then, like, she wasn't," said eventual fourth-place finisher **Michaela Rose** of LSU, who ran 1:59.32, her 10th sub-2 performance this year.

What's indisputable is the fallout. Mu fell out of contention. Rogers had to leap out of the way. **Sage Hurta-Klecker** had to step entirely off the track, into the infield, to keep from falling. Neither Rogers or Hurta-Klecker ever got back into the race; Hurta-Klecker finished fifth in 2:00.38, and Rogers was seventh in 2:01.12.

At the bell, Rose of LSU was leading with Akins tucked in behind. With about 250 to go, Akins made her move, and she ran the rest of the race alone, pulling away from the field.

"I wasn't even thinking," Akins said. "I just kind of felt it in my spirit to just go for it and then went."

Rose maintained second place until the front stretch when she was passed first by Whittaker, a few strides later by Wilson.

"Honestly," Wilson said, "I think I'm going to need to watch it to know what happened."

Wilson upended her life when her coaches moved from Atlanta to Indianapolis, giving up her sponsor to follow them. For a couple of months, she needed to work as a nanny to support herself. She knew she was on the right track when she won her first U.S. title at the USATF Indoor Championships in February, and that victory got her a sponsorship from Nike.

Until Monday, though, the outdoor season, however, hadn't gone exactly the way she wanted.

"I kept trying to remind myself it doesn't have to be perfect, it doesn't have to be pretty," she said. "You just have to get it right on this day. I've made a lot of mistakes over the years, and I've learned from them. And I think I applied every single one of those lessons into my race today."

Whittaker, a junior at Stanford, swept the 800 at the NCAA indoor and outdoor championships this season, becoming the first female athlete to do so since Rogers in 2017. She competed in the 2021 Olympic Trials as a high schooler and said she was just happy to be there. But she told herself, "Next time I make it to the trials, I'm not just going to be content."

In 2023, she fell at the end of her semifinal, and she said she told herself, “Next year, I’m making the team.”

“And I did,” Whittaker said, smiling. “So I’m happy.”

As Akins did three years ago, Mu kept running after she fell. The Hayward Field crowd cheered her down the final straightaway, and she crossed the line, sobbing, in 2:19.69.

“Stuff happens,” Akins said. “The sport is crazy and unpredictable and tough. Nobody deserves that. She didn’t deserve that today. I didn’t deserve it three years ago. It just happens.”

St. Pierre, Cranny Separated By .02 Seconds In 5,000

The other women’s distance final of the evening was also memorable, with **Elle St. Pierre** outleaning **Elise Cranny** at the line to win the 5,000 meters, 14:40.34 to 14:40.36.

“The finish was definitely tough,” said St. Pierre, who said she was relying on her 1,500-meter speed. “I felt good the whole race. Maybe I should have started going a little sooner.”

Third-place finisher **Karissa Schweizer** and fourth-place finisher **Parker Valby** also broke the 15-minute barrier, running 14:45.12 and 14:51.44, respectively, making it the fastest women’s 5,000 in Olympic Trials history. Never before had even three women broken the 15-minute barrier at the Trials. (The Olympic standard is 14:52.00).

“The crowd was just crazy, so it felt like we were flying the whole time,” St. Pierre said. “I definitely loved feeling that energy.”

Valby, who earlier this month swept the 5,000 and 10,000 at the NCAA championships for Florida, led the first 4,200 meters, with the three veterans running easily behind. As the runners came up on two laps to go, St. Pierre made the first move, and then the others followed. Valby couldn’t keep up.

“I feel like it played out exactly how I thought,” Cranny said.

St. Pierre is also competing in the 1,500, and while she said she hasn’t yet decided whether she’d compete in both events in Paris if she makes the team in the 1,500, she allowed that the schedule would make that difficult. If St. Pierre makes the 1,500 and chooses to run that event, Valby did achieve the Olympic standard.

St. Pierre hadn’t originally intended to run the 5,000, but she decided she didn’t want to pass up the opportunity. She made her first world team in 2019 in the 5,000.

“I think it would have been hard to sit at home and watch a 5,000 go by,” she said. “There’s enough days to recover.”

Year	Videos	News	Photos	Blogs
2025	<u>814</u>	<u>308</u>	<u>13029</u>	
2024	<u>5183</u>	<u>1543</u>	<u>74808</u>	
2023	<u>5385</u>	<u>1362</u>	<u>77508</u>	