

## ERIN TAYLOR-TALCOTT – 50KM PIONEER



An interesting thing happened a couple of months ago in America when, on Sunday 11 September, Erin Taylor-Talcott won the USA 40km Championship outright with a time of 3:41:50. She then decided to kick on for a 50km time, recording an American women's best of 4:41:36, a time which ranks her quite highly in the USA rankings and which bettered the standard required to contest the USA Olympic 50km trial. The only issue – she is a woman and the World Cup 50km is a men-only event. The following article, written by Heather Ainsworth for the New York Times, traces what followed.

OWEGO, N.Y. — After training along the country roads of this village to the south of the Finger Lakes, Erin Taylor-Talcott recently achieved a qualifying time for the 2012 Olympic trials in the 50-kilometer racewalk. Except for one catch: there is no 50K racewalk for women at the trials or at the Olympics.

So Taylor-Talcott sought for two months to gain entry into the men's race at the United States trials, to be held Jan. 22 in Santee, Calif. The 50K (31-mile) racewalk remains a lingering vestige of inequality in international track and field, a sport that for decades prohibited women from competing in Olympic distance events from the half-mile to the marathon.

Even among American men, the 50K race is obscure. Only about a dozen are expected to compete in the Olympic trials, and perhaps one will qualify for the London Games next summer. Still, Taylor-Talcott, 33, wanted to compete in the trials to bring attention to women's interest in the event.

On Wednesday she finally gained provisional entry into the trials and, according to a spokeswoman for USA Track and Field, perhaps became the first woman to do so in a men's event.

Taylor-Talcott can compete in the 50K Olympic trials as a so-called guest upon agreeing not to try to participate in the men's event at the London Games, the national governing body said.

She said she was willing to sign a waiver this one time, given that her chance of achieving the 2012 Olympic participation standard of 4 hours 9 minutes was remote. Her best time is 4:41:36, which is under the United States men's Olympic trials standard of 4:45 but nowhere near the top times of male racers from countries like Russia, China, Australia, Ecuador, Italy, Norway and Spain.

"It's more important to be on the starting line at the trials than to say I should be allowed to go to the Olympics," Taylor-Talcott said. "It's a huge first step to getting a women's 50K added."

Unresolved is what would happen if Taylor-Talcott qualified at the same trials for the 50K men's event at the World Cup of racewalking in May in Russia. The standard for that event is considered more attainable, but in that case Taylor-Talcott could find herself challenging track and field's world governing body, the International Association of Athletics Federations, whose rules would seem to exclude her.

"This is great, but I still want the ability to be named to international teams," Taylor-Talcott said Wednesday. "That'll be a bigger fight."

Her effort over the past two months to compete alongside men at the Olympic trials had raised a fundamental question about what should determine an athlete's eligibility: performance or sex?

“Since it is the trials for the men’s team, some people think women shouldn’t be competing,” said Elliott Denman, a 50K racewalker at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, freelance journalist and founder of the modern Shore Athletic Club in New Jersey, to which Taylor-Talcott belongs. “But she has the time. She has earned every right to compete in some capacity.”

A 20-kilometer (12.4-mile) racewalk became an Olympic sport for women in 1992. There is also a separate 20K race for men. The I.A.A.F. said there was insufficient interest among female competitors to hold an Olympic race at 50 kilometers, calling the event “pretty much nonexistent.”

Yet, Taylor-Talcott excels at the longer distance, having won first place in the past two 50K United States championships for women, a race that is contested nationally but not internationally in major meets.

Unofficially, she is the 14th-fastest woman ever at 50K, recording her best time on Sept. 11 at a race in Ocean Township, N.J. And she is faster than some elite American men in a sport that requires competitors to keep one foot on the ground at all times and to straighten their leading leg as the body passes over it.

During that same race in September, Taylor-Talcott also won the national women’s 40K (24.8-mile) title, bettering the time of her husband, Dave Talcott, who won the men’s title, by more than three minutes.

“The I.A.A.F. says there has to be a certain amount of interest before they include a 50K for women,” Talcott said. “However, without any races, there’s never going to be any participation.”

In conversations over the past week, Taylor-Talcott had expressed frustration over her inability to get direct answers from track and field officials about the status of her eligibility for the Olympic trials.

“They’re afraid I’ll beat a bunch of guys, and that’ll be embarrassing,” she said Tuesday at her home west of Binghamton, N.Y. “My response to the guys is, Go faster. They should be saying, We have a girl that’s pretty good at 50K; let’s be proud.”

Article from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/sports/erin-taylor-talcott-allowed-to-racewalk-in-50k-olympic-trials.html?\\_r=3](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/sports/erin-taylor-talcott-allowed-to-racewalk-in-50k-olympic-trials.html?_r=3)

The long awaited USA Olympic 50km trial was held on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2012 and it proved a great race on two fronts. Firstly, John Nunn and Tim Seaman battled hard at the front, Nunn eventually winning out to presumably pick up the Olympic B standard spot on offer. Secondly, Erin Taylor-Talcott improved her PB by 8 minutes to take 6<sup>th</sup> place with an excellent 4:33:22.



**Erin Taylor-Talcott crosses the finish line in 6<sup>th</sup> place with a big PB of 4:33:22**

Photo from <http://imperialbeach.patch.com/articles/santee-sees-dramatic-duel-for-spot-on-olympic-team#photo-8949282>

Erin's time of 4:33:22 was of course a new American Record and the 10<sup>th</sup> fastest women's 50km of all time. Here is what she had to say in her Facebook page after the event

*Thank you all SOOOOOO much for your support. It was a great day out there. I raced fairly smart and got three American records; 25K, 35K and 50K. I placed 6th overall. I have heard that at least one of the men won't*

*be going to Russia so I am asking to be put on the team. Not sure if it'll happen, but I'll fight for it. Thank you, thank you, thank you for the people who believed in me and thought I should be racing at this National Championship/World Cup Trials/Olympic Trials. Score one for women!!!!*

1	JOHN NUNN	33	M	SAN DIEGO	CA	4:04:38
2	TIM SEAMAN	39	M	IMPERIAL BEACH	CA	4:05:50
3	BEN SHOREY	29	M	KENOSHI	WI	4:17:40
4	PATRICK STROUPE	27	M	ARMSTRONG	MO	4:19:43
5	ERICH CORDERO	36	M	POMPANO BEACH	FL	4:28:04
6	ERIN TAYLOR-TALCOTT	33	F	OWEGO	NY	4:33:22
7	ALLEN JAMES	47	M	SANBORN	NY	4:39:24
8	RAY SHARP	52	M	HOUGHTON	MI	4:41:45
9	MICHAEL MANNOZZI	25	M	BOARDMAN	OH	4:48:19
10	DAVE MCGOVERN	46	M	LOCUST VALLEY	NY	5:24:18