



Photos submitted by TAMARA SECHLER

Kiana Sechler, 9, goes up and over in the high jump, which she competed in at the U.S. Track and Field Association national meet in Wichita, Kans.

## Kids travel around the country to meets

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the national event.

Kiana, 9, a fourth-grade pupil at Indian Valley Intermediate, also competed in jumps. In the high jump, she was 22nd in her age group with a height of 1.05 meters (3 feet, 5 1/4 inches). Her 3.23-meter long jump (10 feet, 7 1/4-inches) was the 39th best.

Noah Shepherd (he calls Sprecher "Pap") is the son of Meredith and 1st Lt. Joshua Shepherd, and Alyssa Lynch, daughter of Carly and husband Shawn, both 8 years old, traveled to Whispering Pines Golf Course in Myrtle Beach, S.C., for the USATF Junior Olympic cross country nationals, where they competed in the 2K (1 1/4 miles).

Their finishes were both in the top 100 in the sub-bantam division — and both were

happy to proclaim themselves winners.

"I beat him at nationals," Alyssa says as her mother protested that she didn't. "I came in 74th and he was 77th."

"I beat her time," Noah answers.

In fact, he ran a personal best 9:08.47 — a 51-second improvement — in the national meet, while Alyssa finished the race in 9:52, a drop of 54 seconds from her previous best time. Noah also has run the 5K — the same distance as high school cross country — in about 24 minutes.

Alyssa, in third grade at Indian Valley Elementary, started running last August. She began by running a mile, she said, and worked her way up to three miles within a few weeks.

Noah, a second-grader at Strodes Mills Elementary, has run the 5K four times in com-



petition already. He says the coaching advice he got from Sprecher was simple: "Run your best."

Alyssa joined the club because "my mom told me" — and she wants to be just like mom.

For all the young runners, a handful of qualifying meets lead up to the national event.

The kids were lucky enough to stay relatively close to home this year, although the meet locations change. The only long distance was at the end, with the older kids taking the worst of it when they had to go to Kansas.

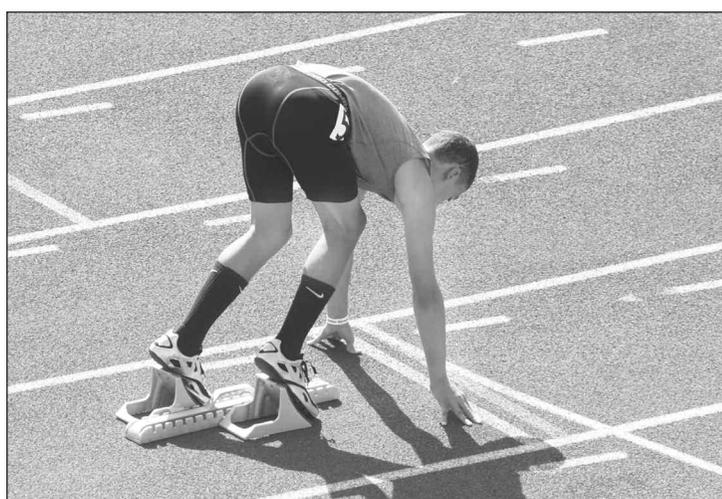
"We drove. Me, my mom and dad, my grandfather and Malik," Kiana explains, noting

Kiana, left, and Malik Sechler both took part in multiple events at the USATF Junior Olympics national championships. Malik finished in the top 10 in one event and the top 20 in two others.

it was the longest trip she's ever been on, with about 20 hours in the car. "It took us two days. It was fun, but I liked the track meet more than the trip."

"It was really hot," Malik says. "The first day I ran the 200, and then the second day I ran the 100. On the last day I did the long jump."

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Malik Sechler, 12, comes out of the starting blocks and down the track in a sprint event at the USATF national meet. He was among the top finishers in both the 100- and 200-meter dashes.