

MIT Loses Championship on Relay DQ For Second Year in Succession

MIT Women's Track and Field traveled to the University of Southern Maine for the [New England Division III Indoor championship](#) this weekend. For the second year in a row MIT was favored to win and for the second year in a row they managed to lose the meet due to a disqualification after having won the event, this year in the final event of the meet, leaving MIT in second place with 109 points to 116 for Tufts University.

The meet started on Friday with the women's Pentathlon, with the rest of the events taking place on Saturday. Going into the meet, MIT, Tufts and Williams were seeded well above the rest of the competing teams; MIT approximately 28 points above Tufts, and in third was Williams, last year's indoor champions. On paper, all MIT needed to do was perform as expected and the victory would be theirs. The majority of the Engineers points were expected to come from the middle-distance and distance events, with many of those athletes doubling and tripling in these events (800-5K) and the relays. In order to pull out a victory MIT would need support from the field events.

Tufts University has not been in such a strong position coming into a championship meet in many years, and it was obvious they were ready to battle and show their presence. Jackie Konopka '14, seeded second, and competing in her second pentathlon in five days against a strong field of 14 athletes was hoping to get MIT on the scoreboard. Konopka was in the lead over the competition going into the 800m, the final event, by 12 pts. In order for Konopka to win she would need to run a seven second PR to beat a very strong 800m runner from Tufts. Konopka competed to the best of her physical ability, running a 2:30.02, but lost the lead, finishing second with a PR of 3214 pts. Tufts improved on their seed by scoring 12 pts.

The Pole Vault started things off for MIT on day two, an event that was poised to be strong for MIT, favored to score 15 points and having 6 athletes entered. Lauren Kuntz '13 was the top seed, and teammates Cimran Viridi '16, Joanna Chen '15, Abigail Klein '14, Marissa Engle '15 and Sherry Wan '16 were there to add points if possible. The women competed well with Engle, Klein, Viridi and Chen all clearing 10-4 with Kuntz still waiting to come in. At 10-10 only Viridi and Chen were able to clear, securing a top eight scoring position. At the next height 11-03 Chen was not able to clear, finishing in seventh place. Kuntz opened with a nice clearance as did Viridi. At 11-09.75 Viridi failed, claiming fifth place while Kuntz had no problem, looking relaxed and happy to be competing. At 11-11.75 only Kuntz and Adams from Williams cleared. The bar moved to 12-01.50 and both missed all three attempts, and with both having no previous misses, they tied for first. A jump off followed, and Adams missed her attempt at 12-01.50 while Kuntz cleared it, securing her victory

Nicole Zeinstra '16 got the running events off to a great start with a dominant 1200 leg in the Distance Medley Relay. She took the lead early in the first lap, continuing to push the pace to a 3:41 leg to give her teammates a 10 second lead. Kayla Harris '15 kept things under control with her 62.6 400 leg and Marie Burkland '13 extended the lead to 20 seconds with her 2:22 800 leg. The Engineers knew they needed a big lead heading into that last leg with national steeple champ Keri Lambert ready to give chase. Lambert did indeed close things up but Allison Hallock '16 took care of business with a 5:12 anchor leg, enough to give MIT the win.

In the two throwing events, the Weight Throw and Shot Put, Tufts best events, they outscored MIT 45-4. The only bright spots for Tech were a fifth place in the Shot Put by freshman Isabella Stuopis and a personal best 44-10 3/4 in the Weight Throw by Ashley Wheeler '15.

In the remaining field events, the Triple Jump and High Jump, MIT had Michelle Johnson '15, and, Preethi Vaidyanathan '15 perform well above their seed marks to give MIT a needed boost in points. Vaidyanathan tied a school record in a jump off at 1.63m (5-4.25) earning third place. Johnson was in fifth place going into finals. With the strong support of her team, Johnson was able to move up to third with a season best jump of 11.07m (36-4), her six points were needed, giving the team a nice motivational boost.

In the 5k, top seed Molly Rouillard of Bridgewater State set an aggressive pace with only Elaine McVay '15 there to follow. Martina de Geus '14 settled in eighth place with Kali Benavides '15 and Shivani Kaushal '15 settling in around tenth. Things stayed steady until a mile to go when some in the front group fell apart while others made moves. McVay made a strong move to the front and Kenny from Williams gave chase. The biggest moves farther back in the pack came from de Geus and Benavides. Kenny finally passed McVay in the last 50 meters while de Geus and Benavides each caught a couple of runners to finish up with pr's of over 20 seconds to go with their sixth and seventh place finishes. McVay ran a season best 17:19.72 while de Geus joined MIT's top ten list with her first sub 18 5K, running a 17:57.81. Benavides ran 18:13.76

The Mile Run was set up to be the premiere event of the meet. The slower section was won in 4:59 and the seeded section featured three NCAA champions, numerous all-Americans, and the three fastest milers in MIT history; Sarah Quinn '16, Louise van den Heuvel '14 and Brooke Johnson '13. Randelle Boots of Wellesley took things out for the first 200 but nobody seemed willing to follow. Things bunched up eventually and stayed that way for the opening 800. van den Heuvel '14 fell victim to the traffic when a stumble cramped her hamstring, encouraging her to drop out. Quinn showed little fear of the big names in the race when she took control after the 2:32 opening 800 and threw down a 71 third 400 with MIT's Brooke Johnson '13 leading the chase. Quinn was finally caught by Tousley of Middlebury but held off the rest of her opponents, which included NCAA Champions Lambert and Boots. Although MIT did not get the points they hoped for they were able to put three in the top 10---Quinn second 4:56.20,

Alexandra Taylor '14 eighth 5:00.57, and Johnson 10th 5:02.78--while no other team had more than one.

In the 800 Middlebury's Juliet Ryan-Davis took off like a shot going through the 200 in 31 flat. Taylor panicked with the fast pace and selfishly dropped out to leave Cindy Huang '15 to get all the points for the Engineers and severely hamper the relays at the end of the meet. Running a more sensible pace Huang was running a strong and smart race en route to a third place in a season best 2:18.20.

Johnson doubled back in the 1000 where she was the top seed. van den Heuvel was back from her hamstringing problem and hopefully score some points. Johnson was part of a pack of four that battled for the win the entire way. She was edged out for the win but grabbed third in 2:59.75 while van den Heuvel bounced back from her hamstringing tightness to slip past three runners in the final 50 meters to grab fifth in 3:02.34.

Tech entered the 3k trailing Tufts by 16 points but the Engineers had a strong, if not tired group ready for battle. Zeinstra continued her day of lonely front running as she won the slow section in commanding fashion with a 10:28.58, a mark that was likely to place. In the seeded section Quinn doubled back and cruised to an early lead to win comfortably in 9:58.93. McVay followed up her second place in the 5k with a third place finish in 10:20.01 to put a strong finish to her 8k worth of racing. de Geus also pulled off an impressive 5k/3k double with another sixth place finish in 10:26.64 while Zeinstra's time held up for 7th.

With only two events remaining, the 4x400 Relay and the 4x800 Relay, MIT was five points above Tufts and more than 20 over Williams. In the 4x400 Relay Tufts was seeded fourth while MIT was not seeded to place. MIT's competitive spirit came through strong, and the 4x400R turned out to be one of the most inspirational races of the day for MIT. Tech's normal alternate relay legs were injured and unable to race, leaving the Engineers searching among the field event athletes to find a fourth leg. Stephanie Birkhimer '14 would be that person even though she was unable to finish the TJ re-injuring her foot on a bad landing on her second phase. Despite her injured foot, she wanted to run for the team, and she assured the coaches she could finish the 400 leg. With no other option to consider, Tech hoped for the best, making her the lead off runner. Running in the first of four sections MIT needed to not only win the section but strive to run a 4:10 to be in a position to score. Birkhimer ran an inspiring 63.6 leg to put MIT in a good position. Katharina Ross '16 ran a 63.1 leg, putting pressure on Isabel Crystal '16, who was doubling back from a 1:41.63 PR in the 600, to run a fast leg to get MIT close to the needed 4:10. Crystal ran a 62.6 giving the baton to anchor Kayla Harris '15. Harris ran 64.1 for a 4:13.22. While the team did not run the time they were hoping for, they did win their section, and more importantly, it provided the inspiration for their teammates to close out the meet.

Tech's time was not good enough to score while Tufts was only able to place fifth, leaving MIT one point ahead going into the 4x800 Relay, the final event.

The 4x800 team on paper was seeded second but expected to win, and all they had to do was to finish in front of Tufts, and the championship would be wrapped up. The situation was complicated with Taylor dropping out of the 800 with no injury, leaving her open to protest for honest effort if she ran the relay. Burkland likewise dropped out of the 1000 and Melissa Showers '13 did not race the Mile due to a tight back. The women had put themselves in a challenging situation. Quinn wanted to run for the team, her third race, with only fifty minutes since her 3000 victory. As unfair as it was to Quinn there were no other viable options. Quinn stepped up to run the third leg. Tufts would not go down without a fight and with fresh relay runners they hoped to compete with MIT. Tufts gave MIT a run for the money for the first leg, but van den Heuvel ran an excellent 2:21.6. Huang took the baton and pulled away with a 2:18.9 split. Quinn ran a brilliant 2:19.2 leg and Johnson finished it off with a 2:22.4 for an apparent victory. MIT expected a protest from Tufts University, challenging the honest effort rule. Tufts would ask for the DQ of van den Heuvel since she dropped out of the mile, and then continued to race and score in the 1000 and relay. Instead the head referee informed the coaches that the 4x800 team had a relay exchange violation, which disqualified them. For the second year in succession the team was left with the feeling the meet had been stolen from them. It is painful for the team to know they have done the work to score enough points to win only to then make a mistake that takes it away.

The women will focus on the NCAA Division III Championship in three weeks, doing what it takes to get there and score well as a team.