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## Local Sports

# Meet Ruby Ford, Junior Olympics gold medalist

By Marcus Lomtong

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Ruby Ford, 9, won gold medals for the 800 and 1500-meter track events at the Junior Olympics. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

FAIRFIELD — Ruby Ford might sound like your average 9-year-old, with interests in dancing, art and listening to the angelic voice of artist Gwen Stefani.

But if you somehow catch Ford in her running gear on the track, she'll erase that average 9-year-old thought in an instant — or maybe in 2 minutes, 36.89 seconds.

Ford had traveled just under 2,000 miles to the AAU Junior Olympic Games in Humble, Texas, from Aug. 1-6, capturing gold medals in the 800- and 1,500-meter races.

The youngster was 7 seconds away from a national record in the 800, finishing with a time of 2:36.89, which was 2 seconds

ahead of the runner-up.

Her 1,500 event, though, was much, much closer. It even took something that she'd never done before in order to win.

Heading into the final 300 meters, Ford found herself between fifth and sixth place, which is normal as she follows a very specific race plan, according to her father and coach Quentin Ford. But as the final 50 meters were approaching, the 9-year-old "surged" and got within 5 meters of the leader, Ameenah Rodriguez of Camden, New Jersey.

Just as the finish line approached, Ruby Ford leaned, not knowing what the outcome was until the official results were announced.

Quentin Ford said his daughter had never leaned in any race previous to that 1,500 — despite four years of races and recently teaching her how to lean.

But having the 2016 Rio Games track and field trials on TV served more of a purpose that day, other than to just gain ratings. That's where Ruby Ford learned to lean, watching the trials on a television earlier that day.

Now with two medals, the young athlete proudly decorates the desk in her room with her two new pieces of hardware, which, according to



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her father, are “the coolest” of all her medals.

Running was sort of in Ruby Ford’s future, as many of her family members were runners, including two cousins, Kayla and Daysia Ford, of Vacaville High School, and her father. In fact, her cousins are two legs of the girls 4x400 relay team that set a Sac-Joaquin Section Masters record time of 3:44.59 last season.

So with all that inspiration, it may not always be easy for Ruby Ford to get out of bed, but it definitely pushes her.

“She’s been pretty much running since we can remember,” Quentin Ford said. “She started walking at 8 months and she couldn’t wait to get on the track like her older sisters and cousins. . . . I’m extremely happy for her, seeing all the hard work. (Running) isn’t just something you can fall out of bed and do. I think she has the right mind. That’s where anything starts.”

Ruby Ford even admitted that her father, in particular, was a huge inspiration and not just because he is a former runner himself.

“Yea, I can beat him,” she said of taking him on in the 1,500.

But until March 2017, Ruby Ford will have to be like an average 9-year-old who attends Center Elementary School, “Just a Girl,” as Gwen Stefani once sang about as the front-woman of No Doubt.



Ruby Ford, 9, won gold medals for the 800 and 1500-meter track events at the Junior Olympics. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic) Ruby Ford, 9, won gold medals for the 800 and 1500-meter track events at the Junior Olympics. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic) Ruby Ford, 9, won gold medals for the 800 and 1500-meter track events at the Junior Olympics. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)



**Marcus Lomtong**

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