

VC Star.

HIGH SCHOOL

Ventura's Valentina Fakrogha is The Star's Girls Track and Field Athlete of the Year

Derry Eads Special to Ventura County Star

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Valentina Fakrogha had issues.

Transitioning from swimming to track and field, the Ventura High sophomore was introduced to the high jump. There was an immediate problem.

Mildy put, she absolutely did not like the event.

So much that Fakrogha was ready to quit the sport. Anything else.

"I had issues," said Fakrogha.

Seeing Fakrogha's potential, a Ventura coach made a proposition.

"He asked me to stay with it for a month," she said. "If I still didn't like it, I could drop it."

As Fakrogha was finding her way as a 200- and 400-meter sprinter so did her third-best event: High jump. By season's end, Fakrogha won the first of three league high jump titles and placed fifth in the 2022 CIF-Southern Section Division 2 finals.

The groundwork and gained confidence would lead Fakrogha to the 2024 CIF-State girls high jump title as a senior, clearing 5 feet and 8 inches, becoming only the third Ventura County athlete to stand atop the awards platform with a first-place medal.

It would be one of a number of milestone achievements for the The Star's Girls Track and Field Athlete of the Year.

She repeated as the CIF-SS Division 2 section high jump champion, won the Masters and Ventura County titles, and left her mark with school records in the 200, 400, high jump and 4x400 relay.

And Fakrogha was a member of the Ventura distance medley that set a national high school record of 11:21.85.

"I didn't expect the national record," said Fakrogha.

When the time of her 400 split of the relay was announced at under 55 seconds — a personal best — she was caught up in the moment.

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"I heard the splits of (Melanie) True in the 1,200, Aelo (Curtis) in the 800 and Sadie (Engelhardt). When we were told that we had broke the record, it was a surreal feeling."

Speaking of relays, Fakrogha and Ventura's 4x800 girls relay were vying for state titles at the same time last month in Clovis.

The high jump had come down to a showdown between Fakrogha and Summer Young of Menlo.

As Fakrogha was awaiting her turn at the height of 5-9, there was a collective gasp from the crowd as Ventura fumbled the baton pass.

"I looked over to them," said Fakrogha. "That added to some stress. But I was able to shake it off."

The Ventura relay won the title with a state-record time. Shortly after that, Fakrogha was declared the state champion.

There to congratulate her were the relay members. For a brief time, Ventura led the team scoring with 30 points, only to be passed by Long Beach Wilson in the meet's final track event.

Sports weren't always high on Fakrogha's priorities.

Her parents encouraged her to model and attend acting school. There are some clips that were made. She competed in a game show that had contestants dealing with a series of puzzles.

Athlete. Swimmer. Solver of puzzles. Winning personality.

Sounds like a perfect contestant for the long-running TV show "Survivor."

Fakrogha confirmed that indeed someone "reached out to me to be on 'Survivor.' ... That is a possibility sometime down the line. I don't have the time for that now."

This fall Fakrogha will enter UCLA on an athletic scholarship. She will be majoring in biochemistry with a goal of specializing in orthopedics and sports medicine, a lifetime dream.

High jump may not be her main focus on the UCLA women's track team.

Fakrogha's track future may lean toward to heptathlon. Heptathletes accumulate points in the 100 hurdles, high jump, shot put, 200, long jump, javelin, and 800.

"I am stressing about the 100 hurdles," said Fakrogha.

Just like the high jump, good bet she gives it more than a month.

The Star's All-County Girls Track Second Team

- 100 – Niya Clayton, Oaks Christian
- 200 – Madison Easter, Buena
- 400 – Rayah Rodriguez, Oaks Christian
- 800 – Arielle Mckenzie, Calabasas
- 1,600 – Aelo Curtis, Ventura
- 3,200 – Cassidy Kajita, Thousand Oaks
- 100 hurdles, 300 hurdles – Abigail Pace, Newbury Park
- High jump – Madison Thai, Thousand Oaks
- Long jump – Amanda Eames, Westlake
- Triple jump – Mikayla Oliver, Oxnard
- Discus – Avery Estelle, Simi Valley
- Shot put – Natalie Estrella, Oxnard

- Pole vault – Isabella Di Sivelstri, Ventura