

Disney-Based Sprinters Earn Spots on U.S. and Jamaican Olympic Teams for Rio

The U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials recently took place in Eugene, Oregon and several hopefuls who regularly train at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at Walt Disney World Resort participated. These athletes train at Disney under the watchful eye of former U.S. Olympic Track & Field head coach Brooks Johnson, who has coached at least one athlete in every Olympics since 1968. Continuing that streak, sprinter LaShawn Merritt and hurdler Andrew Riley have earned spots on the United States and Jamaican National Olympic Teams, respectively.

Riley, who made NCAA history in 2012 when he became the first male athlete to win national titles in the 100-meter and 110-meter hurdles in the same year, is making his second Olympics appearance. Riley qualified to represent Jamaica in the 2012 London Olympics.

For Merritt, this will be the veteran sprinter's third Olympics. Merritt took home gold in the 2008 Beijing Olympics when he won the 400-meter dash and was on the team that won the 4×400-meter relay. Merritt also has 11 World Championships medals, eight of which are gold.

Merritt entered this month's trials focusing exclusively on the 400-meter race, but decided to enter the 200-meter trials as well. In what came as a surprise to many, Merritt posted a world-leading time of 19.74 seconds in the 200-meter semifinals and would finish second behind fellow veteran sprinter Justin Gatlin (19.75) in the 200-meter finals.

In earning a spot in both races, Merritt puts himself in position to pull a 200-400 double in Rio. This is especially difficult at the Olympics, where the races are on back-to-back days instead of three days apart, like in the trials.

While Merritt is chasing sprinting legend Michael Johnson's 400-meter world-record time of 43.19, he could also set his eyes on another milestone: Johnson is the only male ever to win gold in both the 200-meter and 400-meter in the same Olympics, a feat he accomplished at the 1996 Atlanta Games.

The Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, take place Aug. 5-Aug. 21. But before they go for gold, Riley, Merritt and Coach Johnson will return to ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex mid-July to complete training.