

Von Maltzahn sparkles in Worlds

Wins three gold, two bronze medals

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Hillen Von Maltzahn's poles are in limbo.

No, not *that* limbo.

They've vanished into the ether of air travel baggage handling.

The only bright side for the German native and Troy resident, who turned 60 in January, is that her poles were lost on the way back from this summer's World Masters Championships in Lahti, Finland, not on the way there.

That allowed her to win her fifth gold medal in the pole vault and 10th overall since she first went to the worlds in 1999. Von Maltzahn made sure her medals were in her carry-on, so she came back with golds in the pole vault, 2,000-meter steeplechase and 1,600 relay, and bronzes in the 400 and triple jump, out of eight events in which she competed in late July and early August.

"The best one was the pole vault, because that's my serious event," she said on Thursday night.

Von Maltzahn has become a terror in world competition since she moved to the U.S. from Germany in 2000.

She broke the European age-group record and tied her personal record with a 9-2½ in an Empire State Liberty Tour series event this year.

Adding another layer to her already impressive versatility, she also started steeplechasing this year, and broke the European age-group record at another Liberty Tour meet.

Three days before leaving for Finland, she set the stage for her big run at the worlds by nailing the 9-2½ in the vault.

In Lahti, because there were so few women competing in some of the age groups, everyone was lumped in one flight, about a dozen women total, and three, including Von Maltzahn, were in the 60-64.

The opening height was less than three feet, so Von Maltzahn waited until the height reached 7-6.

By then, everyone else was out, but she had been standing around for so long that it took some time to get warmed up and find her rhythm.

She missed on her first two, then made the third. If she had missed, the two other women in the 60-64, Mary Trotto of the U.S. and Lakshmi Karuppaswamy of India,

would have won gold and silver, respectively, and Von Maltzahn would have had nothing, in her best event.

"The third attempt, that was fine," she said. "Then they went up by four inches at a time, and I made each one on the first attempt. After 8-8, I could tell them what height I wanted, and I said 9-2¾ so I could get a new PR, but I missed all three."

Von Maltzahn, who is married to Wolf Von Maltzahn, the associate vice president of biomedical research at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, had been without a coach since March, but was able to coach herself with the help of her husband's kids, who brought a digital video camera to practice.

"I know what it's supposed to look like," she said. "If I didn't see it, OK, I have to push my leg up more, or hold my right knee, my knee drive needs to be better. Of course, I could look at it in slow motion, so I could see it better."

Von Maltzahn's other golds came in the steeplechase (9:34.12), where she beat Irene Rodriguez of Colombia by all of 1.85 seconds, and as part of a German team in the 1,600 relay.

She bronzed in the open 400 (1:12.68) and the triple jump, and was also fourth in the high jump and long jump and sixth in the 100.

Also, "they kicked me out of the 4-by-1, because it was too close in time [to another event], it was in a different stadium. I wanted to save my strength," she said.

That's one of the pitfalls of competing in so many events, but Von Maltzahn was able to manage her schedule, right down to the second.

She said she could have won the steeplechase by a more comfortable margin, but played some cat-and-mouse to save some energy for the 1,600 relay an hour and a half later.

Again, because of short age group divisions, they stacked 17 women into the steeplechase, so Von Maltzahn wrote the bib numbers of the four women in the 60-64 on her hand so she could monitor their position during the race.

"One woman passed me on the first curve of the last lap, and I thought, 'Oh, great.'" Von Maltzahn said. "OK, I'm not running for time, I'm running for place. The second-from-last barrier was the



PHOTO PROVIDED

Hillen Von Maltzahn of Troy stands in Lahti, Finland wearing the five medals she won there during the World Masters Championships last month.

water pit, which was hard, because there were four women on the barricade at the same time, and they all slowed down for it.

"So the Colombian woman noticed I passed her, and she tried to keep up with me. Again, the last barrier was crowded, and somehow I crossed between them and beat her by less than two seconds. My husband said, 'Oh, man, that was tight.' I said, 'No it wasn't tight. There was a purpose.'"

After the Worlds, Hillen and Wolf spent five days hiking the Oulanka National Park, near the Russian border and the Arctic Circle.

"Oh, yes, I love Finland," she said. "The first time I was there was in '68, when I just finished school. I love that country. The lakes are so pure, you can see the little rocks in the water. It's amazing. The water is so clean, you could drink it. The language is strange. It's not Latin [based]."

Von Maltzahn already has the 2011 World Championships in Sacramento and the 2013 Worlds in Brazil on her calendar.

She's won the pole vault gold five times in total, and three times in a row.

She needs new poles, though. Northwest Airlines figured out that the almost 12-foot piece of baggage was on the wrong flight and made it to Toronto, but from there, it's a mystery.

After having to pay \$200 for the oversized checked bag on the way to Finland, Von Maltzahn was reimbursed for them, but the value of the used poles is \$250 short of what she would have to pay for new ones.

"It's such an unusual piece of luggage," she said. "I called every day, two or three times, where is it? What are you doing? They figured out that they were shipped to Toronto, then the plane that they were supposed to be on was too small, so they stayed there. Now nobody knows where they are."

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