

## Sophia Franklin: Vaulting “Higher and Higher” One Jump At A Time

by Kerry J. Byrnes (OHS Class of '63)



**Click on right photo for a series of photos of Sophia in competition**

Over the past decade Sophia Franklin (**OHS Class of 2017**) has figuratively gotten the jump on her competition, her legs and feet literally taking her from the dance floor (ballet) to the track field and achieving national prominence as a champion pole vaulter. Now Sophia's eyes are set on preparing to compete in the US team trials to qualify for the 2024 Olympics.

**Personal:** Sophia Franklin, born April 28, 1999, is the daughter of Alan and Lori Franklin. She is a graduate of Okemos High School (2013-2017) and, at Michigan State University, majored in psychology while becoming a top athlete in track and field, specializing in the hurdles and the pole vault.

**Okemos High School:** The following 5/25/2016 article by Maya Sanches provides a snapshot and video of Sophia Franklin as of the spring of her junior year at Okemos High.

### **Okemos Track & Field Junior Captain Sophia Franklin Excels at Regionals and States**

OKEMOS - "I wanna get points, I wanna score for my team, and I wanna win," Okemos Track & Field junior captain Sophia Franklin said.

As a junior, Franklin is not only already a captain of the Okemos Track & Field team, but an athlete who the whole team looks up to.

"She puts forth everything she's got every day you know, she's one of the last people to leave," senior teammate Nolan Stanko said.

Because of the hard work she puts in day in and day out, Franklin finished first at regionals in the 100-meter and 300-meter hurdles and placed second in pole vault.

"There was a lot of screaming (when she won)," Lori Franklin, her mother, said. "You know, I was sitting in the stands and when she won the 100 hurdles and PRed. That was a huge deal, because you know as any person in any type of [career] you get stuck, you [plateau] at a certain thing.... She wanted to get under 15 seconds in the hundred hurdles and she got 14.7, I believe. I was just ecstatic for her."

On the day of regionals, everything came together for Sophia, Lori said.

"She tries really hard and you can tell she wants to get better and she wants to improve herself and she brings her teammates with her," Stanko said.

What most people don't know is that Sophia was sick the week of the regional meet.

"She was seeded second in the 100 hurdles and second in the 300 hurdles so we knew she had a chance," Harrod said. "She missed school on Monday and was pretty sick on Tuesday and Wednesday during practice, and just outperformed our expectations on those days," Okemos Track & Field head coach Brian Harrod said.

Being the captain, Franklin is responsible for scheduling and carrying practices, workouts, exercises and more.

"It's made a huge difference. She presents as a really quiet person, but it's really helped her develop her skills talking to people. She's had to lead practices and plan for the team, which has been really good for her, good experience for her," Lori said. "She's really come out of herself. Instead of being more in the shadows, she's learned to take the lead and step out and showing what she can do and helping other people too. She loves being the captain, loves helping everybody on the team."

Sophomore teammate Sage Vanalstine..., also a hurdler, said having Sophia on [the] team has taken her to a better level.

"She's just someone to look up to. I always try to compete with her at practice even though I'm not gonna beat her. But I try to compete with her and she pushes me," Vanalstine said.

In the midst of planning for others, Sophia still made time to improve her own athletic abilities.

"She was born with a lot of natural ability, but she works really really hard," Lori Franklin, her mother, said.

Sophia was a dancer before she ever stepped foot on a track, but a middle school coach's request that she try track got her into the sport.

"What she looked at hurdling the very first (time) was leaping over the hurdles like she would in dance and she loved it, she got hooked on it, wanted to do that all the time," Lori said.

Sophia not only looked like a dancer while jumping over hurdles, but she thought like one too.

"In seventh grade I was just thinking I had to leap over these barriers and get to the finish line and be okay, not fall or anything, so I thought[t] in ballet you do like a leap, and you leap across the floor and I was like I can do that, that'll work fine," Sophia said. "So I started leaping and I was leaping and running, leaping and running. Obviously that's not what you're supposed to do, but it was working at the time."

As time passed, Sophia could not do both dance and track & field, so she decided to stick with the latter and do her best to be good at what she was doing.

"She decided at first she wanted to be really good at hurdles, so she spent all year round working with different teams, coaches, to try to get better," Lori said. "And once she felt like she was getting really good at that she was given the opportunity to try pole vault and she took to that right away, and as a sophomore, at the end of her sophomore year she said I wanna try to get better at pole vault, so she put in time all far round to get better at pole vault and it's really paid off this year."

Her journey from hurdler to pole vault wasn't one Sophia expected for herself, it took a lot of people to tell her to try it.

"In middle school, the high schoolers come and practice drills with you, and I was a hurdler, I told myself I was strictly a hurdler. I was like, 'I'm not going to dabble in pole vault, that's not my thing,'" Sophia said. "They were like 'you should try it' and I was like 'no, I'm going to stick to hurdles.'"

It was only in high school that her coach convinced her.

"When I got to high school, the track coach said 'I really want you to try pole vault,' and I was like 'okay, fine I'll try it, whatever,' and I really liked it the first day. I thought this was so cool, you get to take a stick and this is sweet, so I kept doing it. After a while I realized that after a period of time you can get better. I was progressing at a rate that I was like, 'I like this.' So I watched this girl, she was seeded first in the state. I saw her vault for the first time and I was like 'I wanna be like that, I wanna be that good.'"

Lori, her teammates and coach credit Sophia's ability of goal-setting for her success.

"She's just an outstanding kid. She kinda understand[s] what she needs to do at meets, and she goes out and gets it done," Harrod said.

Sophia listens intently to critiques during practices and takes those into account every time she sets up to pole vault or for a hurdle race.

Not only that, but she thinks about every step she has to take to conquer a goal.

"She's all along been good at goal setting, then planning backwards from the goal saying what do I need to do to get there, so she's got a really good foundation for how to reach her goals," Lori said.

Sophia found the motivation through watching the athletes that were better than her.

"Watching people around me, I was practicing with people that were so good that I was like I wanna be like them and I wanna get better and I wanna be the best," Sophia said. "Like even if I didn't wanna run I was running, even if I didn't do the workout I was still doing the workout. I was there every day."

Harrod said Sophia gets better from watching others, but also herself, and nitpicking what needs to change.

"She's a YouTube junkie," Harrod said. "She watches a lot of videos of pole vault, hurdles, she watches herself. Self-analysis has really helped her."

Sophia has competed at several regional- and state-level meets, but according to Lori, the most challenging was the National Indoor Track Meet in New York.

"She was so thrilled that she qualified for that. That was a different stage, a national stage for her to be on, it was very scary, very nerve wracking. She competed but she didn't do as well as she wanted, and she was devastated by not doing as well as she wanted," Lori said. "I said this is a good experience for you, this is a stepping stone, you know this will make it easier next time around, you know all these things that parents say, that coaches say. And she was at first not really buying into that but after a couple week[s] she was like you know what? It really made a difference. Now going into meets she's much more relaxed, much more calm, not as nervous, because she already went to the big stage and knows what it's like so she's much more calm."

Because of this experience, Sophia has been able to see that improvement does not come without setbacks.

"I think she realizes it's all two steps forward, one step back, one step forward, one step back. So she's learned that and she's really good at persevering through that, when she has a step back she knows get up and do it again, go to practice and start all over and head forward," Lori said.

Going into the MHSAA state finals for track & field on Saturday, June 4, Sophia was able to feel confident in her skills.

She placed second in pole vault, fourth in the 100-meter hurdles and fifth in the 300-meter hurdles.

"She still has a long way to go, but I know that she'll get there because she's willing to put as much time and as much effort to get there," Lori said.

She is two events and respectively one and two spots away of placing top-three in all of her events at states by the time she graduates high school.

"I hope that she wins states, I think she can do it for sure," Vanalstine said.



### [Okemos Track & Field Junior Sophia Franklin Excels at Regionals and States \(6/7/2016\)](#)



### [Okemos Track & Field Sophia Franklin Heads Into Senior Year with New Goals \(6/21/16\)](#)

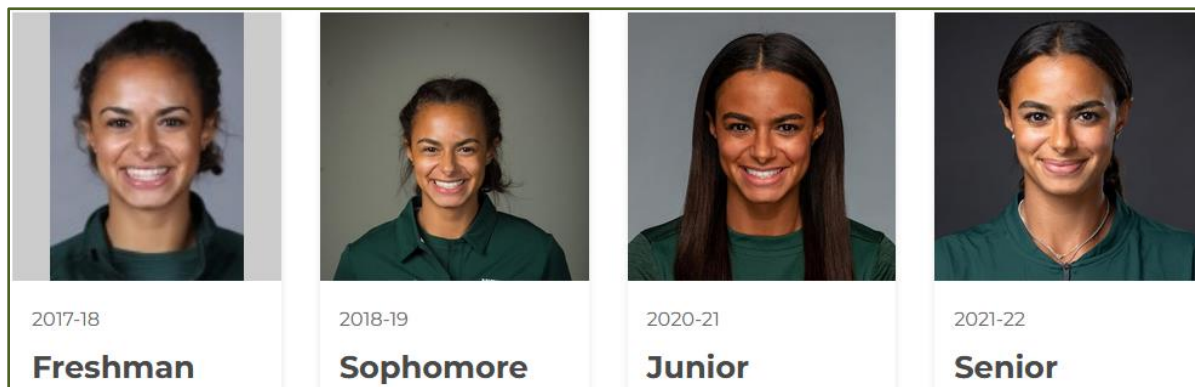
#### **Okemos High Career Summary:**

By the time Sophia graduated from Okemos High in 2017, she was a four-year letter winner in track. Her accomplishments included being an All-Conference and All-District selection in the 100m hurdles, 300m hurdles, and pole vault all four years. During her junior and senior years, she was All-State in the 100m hurdles and the pole vault. During his junior year, she was All-State in the 300m hurdles, and in her senior year placed third at state in the 100m hurdles and pole vault. In 2016 and 2017, Sophia competed in the New Balance Indoor and Outdoor Nationals, achieving Third Place Emerging Elite in the pole vault and Fourth Place Emerging Elite in the 100m hurdles. She was track team captain for two years.



## Michigan State University:

As a Michigan State University Spartan, Sophia has accumulated a remarkable record of accomplishments in both outdoor and indoor track competitions, as detailed below.



### 2017-18 (Freshman)

**OUTDOOR:** Claimed fourth place in the pole vault with a mark of 3.95m, and posted a 100m hurdles time of 15.42 at the Raleigh Relays (March 30-31) ... Was the top collegiate finisher in the pole vault at the Spartan Invitational (April 6-7), finishing third with a height of 3.95m ... Won the pole vault with a mark of 4.05m at the Louisville Invitational (April 13) ... Cleared an outdoor season-best of 4.11m for third place at the Virginia Challenge (April 20-21) ... Took second place in the pole vault with a height of 3.97m at the "GINA" Relays (April 26-28).

**INDOOR:** Placed sixth in the 60m hurdles with a time of 8.95 seconds and third in the pole vault with a mark of 3.80m at the GVSU Holiday Open (Dec. 1) ... Claimed first place in the pole vault (3.80m) at the Wolverine Invitational (Jan. 13), and was a member of the fifth-place 4x400 team with a time of 3:52.00 ... Set a then career-best with a 3.83m pole vault, placing second at the Akron Invitational (Feb. 2-3) ... Set a personal record at Big Ten Indoor Championships (Feb. 23-24), clearing a 4.13m pole vault and placing fourth.

### 2018-19 (Sophomore)

**OUTDOOR:** Claimed first place in the pole vault with a height of 4.25m at the Raleigh Relays (March 29-30) ... Set a new outdoor pole vault school record with a mark of 4.37m at the Spartan Invitational (April 5-6) ... Placed second in the pole vault with a mark of 4.27m at the Louisville Invitational (April 12-13) ... Took second in the pole vault with a mark of 4.18m at the Jesse Owens Classic (Apr. 26-27) ... Finished third in the pole vault with a mark of 4.12m at the Big Ten Championships (May 10-12) ... Had a height of 4.92m in the pole vault at the NCAA East Prelims (May 23-25).

**INDOOR:** Finished second in the pole vault at the GVSU Holiday Open with a height of 3.90m (Dec. 7) ... Took first in the pole vault with a mark of 4.00m at the Wolverine Invitational (Jan. 12) ... Won second-straight pole vault competition with a height of 4.18m, breaking the then

indoor school-record (4.17m) at the Simmons-Harvey Big Ten Invitational ... Took third in the pole vault with a height of 4.15m at the Power Five Invitational (Feb. 1-2) ... Claimed second in the pole vault with a mark of 4.13m at the Music City Challenge (Feb. 8-9) ... Tied her then school-record in the pole vault with a mark of 4.18m to take second at the GVSU Tune-Up (Feb. 15) ... Took the Big Ten title in the pole vault with a new indoor school-record height of 4.19m at the Big Ten Indoor Championships (Feb. 22-23).

### **2019-20 (Junior)**

**INDOOR:** Placed 2nd in the pole vault with a height of 4.25m at the GVSU Holiday Open (Dec. 6) ... Won the pole vault at the Simmons-Harvey Invitational (Jan. 18) with a height of 3.88m. As of this point in her track and field career, Sophia's collegiate bests were: 60m Hurdles - 8.93 seconds; 100m Hurdles - 15.42 seconds; and pole vault: 4.37m, also being the school record holder in both outdoor and indoor pole vault. [Note that the full 2019-2020 athletic year was suspended in March of 2020 due to the arrival of COVID-19. In the next section, we catch up with Sophia's story over her long "senior year" (2020-22).

### **A Long Senior Year (2020-22)**

The academic year of 2020-21 normally would have been Sophia's senior year at Michigan State but the arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020 resulted in a major disruption in collegiate sports during both 2020 and 2021. Given that disruption, we turn to the following Cody Kluge-penned article from [BVM Sports](#) (dated May 26, 2022) for an update on Sophia's athletic career since 2020.

#### **[Sophia Franklin closing career as one of MSU's most-decorated track athletes](#)**



Sophia Franklin has become one of the top college pole vaulters in the country. It's been a long journey to get to this point, one that may have seemed unlikely when she was younger.

In seventh grade, Franklin was persuaded by friends and her gym teacher to try out track. Previously, she had been a dancer, doing ballet until her freshman year of high school.

By the time she reached [Okemos High School](#), Franklin was forced to make a tough decision between the two activities. She chose track, and the decision has led her to unprecedented success.

Throughout her first couple of years of track, Franklin was a hurdler, but tried out many different events in the sport during her freshman season.

“Pole vault just really stuck,” Franklin said. “I remember trying it for the first day and the first time you pole vault, it’s really not super exciting. You barely bend the pole, it’s very basic, but I loved it and thought it was the best thing ever. I loved the adrenaline rush that you got from pole vaulting.”



Sophia Franklin did not start pole vaulting until her freshman year at Okemos High School. (Courtesy: MSU Athletic Communications)

From there, Franklin’s athletic career took off. She began competing in track year-round at Landon Athletics, being trained by Jerry Sessions.

“He really took me to the next level in high school,” Franklin noted.

As Franklin got to her junior and senior years, she began seeing vast improvement, and realized she had what it takes to pole vault in college. During her time at Okemos, Franklin was a four-time letter winner as she excelled in hurdles, and became an all-state selection in the 100-meter hurdles as well as the pole vault in her final two years.

“It’s cool to look back and see my progress and how I kind of progressed throughout the years,” Franklin said. “To see my name up there on the record board a few times definitely made the imprint too.”

Franklin placed third at state to finish off her career in both the 100m and pole vault, but she also began making some national waves around the same time, competing in the New Balance Nationals in both 2016 and 2017.

“I think that was so helpful,” Franklin said. “The first time I went, it was so overwhelming, I had never been to a meet like that. To compete against some of the best in the country in high school, that was something I wasn’t used to ... I think it just prepared me a lot more for college because obviously in college you are going against some of the best in the country.”

Towards the end of her high school career, Franklin was also beginning the recruiting process, searching for the college she’d call home. She thought initially that would be far away as she searched for schools in the south and west.



"I thought I wanted to go as far away as possible," Franklin said. "I was looking at Florida, California, I did not want to be anywhere near Michigan ... All my visits, I had a really good time, I really meshed with a lot of the teams and the coaches. I almost went to a school out in California, but it kind of just came down to Michigan State, it quite literally is home for me and it felt very comfortable ... Everything just felt right at Michigan State. Everything just fell into place."

Also drawing her to [Michigan State](#) was Coach Ceith Creekmur. Franklin was hoping to find a coach similar to what she had early in her career with Sessions, and Creekmur was just that, easing her transition to the collegiate level.



Sophia Franklin credits coaches Jerry Sessions and Ceith Creekmur among others for helping her get to the level she is at today. (Courtesy: MSU Athletic Communications)

"When I came to Michigan State and I met Coach Creekmur, I felt like they were very similar, I really liked his style of coaching and I felt like it made the transition much easier, too," Franklin said.

Once again, Franklin made the right decision. Coming in with few expectations as a freshman, Franklin proved her talent immediately with a fourth-place finish and personal-best 4.13-meter pole vault at indoor Big Ten championships. A solid outdoor season as well led to another personal record and an appearance at the NCAA finals as just a freshman.

"I think my freshman year was full of a ton of surprises," Franklin said. "I didn't really have any expectations going into college, I just wanted to feel it out and do the best that I could ... I think one of my favorite moments was when I made it to nationals. I ended up qualifying for nationals as a freshman which I think is a pretty big deal. I was just so excited."

As impressive as her freshman season was, Franklin absolutely bested it in her sophomore year. During the indoor season, she took home a Big Ten title, also setting a program record with a 4.19-meter jump.

"I think my sophomore year really ramped everything up," Franklin said. "I think I started to make progress. Winning indoor Big Tens, it didn't come as a huge surprise, everyone else but me kind of was ... When it happened I was kind of shocked, but it was definitely really cool."

“They set the bar, in the back of my mind, I wasn’t quite sure if I could clear that, so when I did I was shocked. I think there’s a picture somewhere or a video and my face was just like, ‘Wow, I really did that.’ I always had belief in myself but I think that was the moment where I thought I could really be good at this and really take it to the next level.”

At the top of the mountain after her sophomore year, Franklin would unfortunately endure a challenging junior season. That began with a hamstring injury suffered during the indoor season that continued to nag and hamper the pole vaulter.

“My junior year was a bit of a mess honestly,” Franklin said. “It started out really, really strong again, carrying the same momentum from my sophomore year ... In January, when we came back from winter break, we were doing a workout and I felt a tightness in my legs that I never really felt before. I think everyone has those aches and pains, but this was a little different, I wasn’t able to finish the workout ... It was really hard because every few weeks I’d be like, ‘Oh, it feels great, I’m ready to run again.’ And then I’d run and kind of re-injure it.”



Sophia Franklin has become a three-time Big Ten champion at Michigan State, winning her most recent conference title at the indoor championships earlier this year. (Courtesy: MSU Athletic Communications)

By March, Franklin felt her hamstring was back healthy and ready. But before long, her outdoor season was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I remember the day that we were all at practice and it felt like a dream,” Franklin said. “Our coach told us we had to go home and being told you have to go home is just kind of a weird thing, especially in college. Nobody really had any answers at that point.”

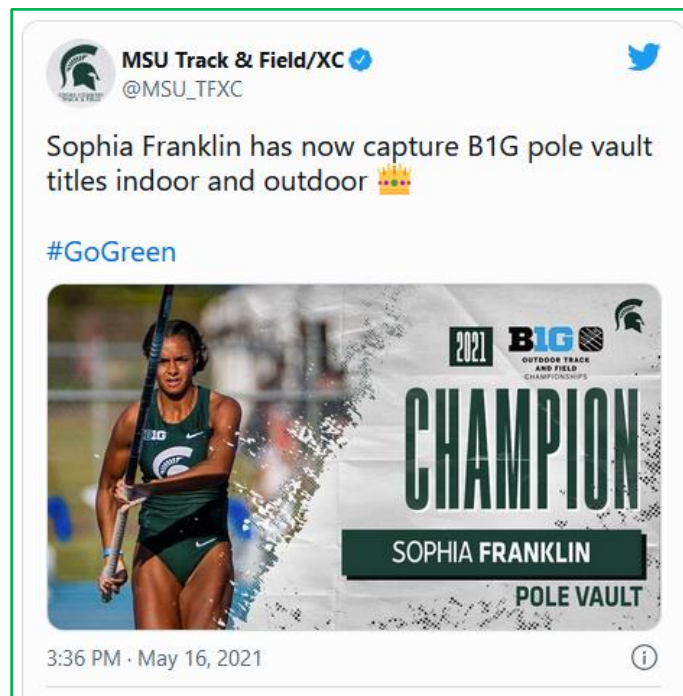
However, Franklin now sees the layoff as beneficial, as the break allowed her to take some time away from the sport, reset and also get her hamstring back to full health.

“I think Covid was a bit of a blessing in disguise because I was able to fully heal my hamstring,” Franklin added. “I think what I really needed to do was to not do anything, but when you want to get back, you kind of just jump the gun.”

In her senior season, Franklin was healthy and able to compete again. However, the beginning of the campaign was challenging, as the long layoff had decreased the level and heights the pole vaulter had been jumping at near the start of her junior year.

"It was really hard when I first got back to it," Franklin noted. "It was really frustrating to not really be where I wanted to."

Still, Franklin finished second at Big Ten indoor championships. Slowly but surely, her confidence was returning, and by her outdoor season, Franklin became a Big Ten champion once again as well as an NCAA All-American.



“Winning Big Tens was so special and then becoming an All-American for the first time was so exciting,” Franklin said. “Being able to have that and share that with my coach, and my family ended up going, that was just a huge moment for me.”

With an extra year of eligibility, Franklin has taken full advantage of her final season throughout the last several months. Her success has continued, breaking her own record in the indoor with a 4.38-meter jump and becoming a Big Ten champion for a third time after winning again in the indoor championships in February.





Unfortunately, the outdoor season has not quite gone as smoothly. Recently at the Big Ten championships, Franklin failed to clear the bar in any of her attempts, a disappointing result for one of the favorites to win another title.

"I ended up no-heighting and that's only happened to me one other time," Franklin said. "It was pretty upsetting, I was definitely really, really disappointed because I came in basically thinking that I was going to win it again. It was really upsetting but pole vault doesn't always go your way, any sport doesn't go your way all the time, you can't win all the time. I'm just really motivated to figure everything out."

After a strong performance at NCAA regionals, Franklin will now head back to the NCAA championships as she concludes her final year competing for the Spartans. She hopes her career doesn't stop there, as Franklin will be moving out to Seattle for a job opportunity but will also keep training in pole vault, striving to compete at an Olympic level someday.



After leaving a lasting legacy at Michigan State, Sophia Franklin will keep training in hopes of getting to the Olympic level someday.  
(Courtesy: MSU Athletic Communications)

"I think there's more left in the tank," Franklin said. "My goal right now is to just keep training and make it to the trials in three years and then just see what happens after that. I don't think the Olympics are a crazy, out-of-reality goal."

No matter what happens from here on out, the program record-holder in both the indoor and outdoor pole vault is bound to go down as one of the most decorated track athletes in Michigan State history.

"I think it won't hit me until after I leave, it's still setting in and it doesn't feel like the end quite yet for me," Franklin said. "I never really thought of myself coming in as someone that would leave such a mark on the program. I thought I was going to be good, but I didn't really know how much success I was going to have here. My goal was to just set the bar as high as possible and have my name on the record board as long as possible, and I think I've done that. It's just really exciting, it's a great feeling. I'm just really proud of the last couple of years here."





### MSU Spartans All-Access feature on Sophia Franklin (3/24/22)

As Sophia's career at Michigan State was near "sticking" a perfect landing, Sophia was one of the four MSU athletes qualifying for the 2022 NCAA indoor championships, with the spring issue of the MSU Alumni Association *Spartan* magazine running the following article on Sophia.



## HIGH-FLYING SOPHIA FRANKLIN BREAKS INDOOR POLE-VAULTING RECORD... AGAIN

Okemos native Sophia Franklin feels right at home breaking records that she set. Having set the school records for outdoor and indoor pole-vault with vaults of 4.37 meters and 4.18 meters in 2019, Franklin demolished both in 2022 with an indoor vault of 4.38 meters at the Mayo Invitational in January.

"I don't really like to brag about that kind of stuff," Franklin said. "It's definitely something I'm very proud of, but I don't think I've ever been super flashy about it. That's just who I am. I'm very proud of everything that I've accomplished and very grateful."

Next up for Franklin: she hopes to take her talents all the way to the Olympic trials in a few years.

#### Franklin's Accomplishments So Far:

- MSU outdoor pole-vault record—4.37m
- MSU indoor pole-vault record—4.38m
- 2019 Big Ten indoor champion title
- 2021 Big Ten outdoor champion title
- 2022 All-Big Ten First Team
- 2022 Second Team All-American

On April 30, 2022, the *Lansing State Journal* published a Ryan Black-penned article titled [“Raising the bar: Okemos native Sophia Franklin keeps rewriting Michigan State record book”](#) which led with the following flying-high photo of Sophia.



Following looking back on Sophia's athletic achievements, the article turns to discussing Sophia's new goal:

#### **Taking aim at the Olympics:**

After putting on the Spartan uniform for the last time, Franklin has no plans to hang up her spikes any time soon.

"I'm not ready to quite stop yet. I think there's a little more in me," she said. "And so I'm going to continue to train."

All with one goal in mind — the trials for the U.S. Olympic team.

"I don't know about making the Olympic team," Franklin said. "I think making the trials is pretty realistic, but then after that it's kind of just seeing how it plays out at the meet, you know?"

[Spartans assistant coach] Creekmur sees no reason she can't compete at the highest level.



"I think it's very realistic," he said. "The women's pole vault is one of the pinnacles for the United States, and she's got the ability to get in the mix with those girls."

When her pole vaulting career finally ends, who knows?

She might go into coaching. She might find her way back to her childhood love: ballet. For now, she'll keep doing what she does every practice and every meet.

Put one foot in front of the other, then see where it leads.

"When you're at this level, it kind of consumes your like whole entire life, which is fine. I mean, I love it," she said. "But even if I'm not at the track actively doing something, I'm watching video or I'm checking up on another meet. So it's like I'm always in my realm."

 **MSU Track & Field/XC**  @MSU\_TFXC · Jun 10

Ending her Spartan career in style!

Sophia Franklin clears 4.35m for a season best and places seventh in the women's pole vault, securing NCAA First Team All-American honors once again.

#GoGreen | #NCAATF



Sophia Soars at NCAA Indoor Championships

### **Looking to the Future:**

With her **OHS** and **MSU** academic and athletic achievements now in her rear-view mirror, and having graduated Spartan proud, Sophia is stepping into the future, her eyes on the prize of “making the team” at the U.S. track and field team trials for the 2024 Olympics – and having the opportunity and experience of a lifetime to compete for an Olympic medal. If past is prologue, this **Chieftain**-cum-**Spartan** will definitely try her hardest and do her best to vault to even newer heights.



**Spartan Proud Graduate Sophia Franklin**

### **Other Newspaper/Magazine/Internet Articles on Sophia Franklin**

Click [here](#) for a multiple page listing of Google search results providing URLs to various newspaper, magazine, and Internet articles on Sophia Franklin.

### **Other Videos of Sophia Franklin in Competition**

Click [here](#) for a multiple page listing of Google search results providing URLs to videos of Sophia Franklin in competition while a student at Okemos High and later at Michigan State.