

## PREP SPOTLIGHT » MATY BAMBA



Granger's Maty Bamba is looking to build on a successful season as she prepares for the state track meet. Bamba won the 100- and 200-meter races at the Granite Invitational last month.

## On the track, Granger's Bamba has found her stride

By ERIC BUTLER

Granger's Maty Bamba

School » Granger  
Grade » Junior  
Sports » Track,  
basketball

Maty Bamba is breathing easy and running free now. During basketball season, the 5-foot-5 junior may have felt out of position when she was sometimes forced to play in the post.

Now out on the track, Bamba is

enjoying the space to run more than ever.

She won both the 100- and 200-meter races at the Granite Invitational at the end of March. It was a moment of individual glory for Bamba, who only participated in relays at the state meet last year.

"No, I surprised myself," said Bamba

of her sterling day. "I think those races were some of my best. I just try to keep calm and try to think of a positive outcome."

Bamba said she's looking forward to running in individual events at state, though she isn't sure who the top competition will come from at the Class 4A level.

A victory at state would help erase some disappointment earlier this year. Bamba and the Lancers won only one basketball game, and she says the season was "tough."

On the track now, Bamba is calm and ready.

"I just like to breathe and relax before the start," she said.

## Monson

—athletes and coaches who were trying to process what the he-double-hockey-sticks was going on and what it meant for their futures — full of hope and promise about the place, the community for which they'd soon enough be skating and boosting their humps in the seasons ahead.

"They told us about their story and what they want to accomplish," Coyotes coach Andre Tourigny said to ESPN. "It was amazing to hear about their core values. Why they're doing this, how much they care about Utah, how much they care about the people in Utah and how much they believe in the state. Honestly, they filled us with emotion and with pride to be a part of that moving forward."

That's the fervor bond, then, the commonality among the two men who have had and/or who will have the greatest impact on Utah sports over the state's first century-and-a-half of existence. Miller bought the Jazz when he had no business doing so, spending well in excess of his total worth and to do so, to save them from becoming someone else's team in someone else's state.

Smith bought the Jazz, part of Real Salt Lake, and now the yet-unnamed hockey team to this generation of fans and also for tomorrow's.

After he took possession of the Jazz, Smith said this about the purchase and his newfound stewardship: "It's not easy to own an NBA team. This is not what people think from the outside, where it's all fun. There's a lot of work, a lot that comes with it. To sit and say, 'Hey, this is a dream, I don't really see it that way. It's work. It's going to be work, and it's going to be hard. The dream comes in what we're able to do for people.'"

If you listen carefully, you can hear Smith echoing all of that now, and saying the same about owning an NHL team.

He said something else back then, too: "We want to win."

Ahh, the winning. Ask Larry somewhere out there in the great beyond, that's the sheerest cliff to climb in the rugged, mountainous, competitive regions of the NBA and the NHL. It's a little like organizing an ascent on Mount Everest, only with other groups of climbers on the trail dead set on bumping and bouncing you and your uniformed sherpas over the edge and into the icy abyss below.

Miller, before his passing in 2009, was able to get the Jazz to the NBA Finals twice in his quarter-century of ownership, and the Jazz made deep runs in



Utah NHL team owners Ryan Smith, Ashley Smith and their children enter the Delta Center during an event introducing Utah's new professional hockey franchise on April 24.

other postseasons.

Smith, since first owning the Jazz in 2020, has struggled to find similar success. Under his — granted — short purview, the team hasn't done much, particularly in the past two seasons, when the Jazz didn't qualify for the playoffs. He switched out the front office, hiring his golf buddy Danny Ainge, who largely disassembled the team that did make the postseason, replacing it with the team that has not, along with a load of draft picks and still-unfulfilled promises for the future. Thus far, the fans have continued to show the devotion is for how long?

Utah's new NHL team this past season did not make the playoffs, although many observers believe the club has enough talented young players and draft picks and other options to make a strong move in the years ahead. The hockey team, despite all the upsurge and uncertainty surrounding the team's ownership and location and lack of an NHL-worthy arena and the entirety of the off-the-ice mess all around, is ahead of the basketball team in that regard. It looks as though Smith will leave the hockey guys in place to do their thing, allowing them to grow into whatever they'll be.

"I think we have a lot of good pieces in place," Tourigny told ESPN. "The young players are coming. They're not necessarily on our team yet, but they're coming. There's a lot to be excited about. Talent needs time to develop. How far away are we?

Time will tell. I hate when you start to say when it's happening. Our play has to do the talking, and our play will do the talking."

It's up to Smith to discover what Tourigny's team needs and to give it the support, financially and otherwise, required to achieve what the owner says he wants.

When Smith met with the players in Arizona, he took the whole outfit on an excursion to Scottsdale National Golf Club, where, while golfing with different groups of players, he asked everyone in sight what he could do not just to make the move to Utah smoother, but to help them in the greater context. Reports say he did what too many team owners don't do: He listened.

He also likely impressed them with his golf swing — the dude's pure with the stick, something like a 2-handicapper.

The debris around the Team Formerly Known As The Coyotes will slowly be swept away. The trauma that swirled throughout the past season, moving just outside the locker room door, was immense and intense, the team's difficulties inside the aforementioned uncertainty hard to tune out, affecting as it did not just the players and coaches and their families, but the team's fan base, as well. That's Arizona's problem now. While the debris be formed into another NHL team down there or will thoughts about hockey simply fade from memory? Beats me. The league seems to want a team in the Phoenix

area, if space and place for a new arena can ever be found.

The sweeping started in earnest with Smith's early connection with his new team, and then was ratcheted full of enthusiasm further when the team was introduced at the Delta Center a little over a week ago, all to the delight of more than 12,000 new fired-up fans gathered for that party.

Players and coaches seemed and seem genuinely excited to skate for Salt Lake.

And with more than 20,000 deposits already shipped down on the barrel for season tickets to NHL games starting this fall, the feeling is mutual, just like Smith figured all along it would be. So it is that a team that never made money in Phoenix will make quick money here.

Vision and love for Utah. The venue that Larry Miller built for basketball was almost always full, too.

Now, it is said that Smith will reconstruct that building to make it suitable for some 17,000-plus hockey fans.

That's the easy part, especially with the help of public money promised by Utah's lawmakers.

The hard part? The real work? The stuff that will keep Utah fans filling into the Delta Center, shelling out their personal cash, season after season after season? That will come for both basketball and hockey in the same way, in the — you-know-what.

The third thing. The winning.

## Utah's NHL team might have name sooner than originally expected

By JEFF TAVISS

Since the moment Utah learned it was getting an NHL team, fans have waited on pins and needles — or pucks and sticks — for word on what the club will be called. Originally, it appeared that owners Ryan and Ashley Smith were content with simply calling the franchise some generic variation of the "Utah NHL team" during its first season before focusing on a real nickname in 2025.

However, last week, that position seemed to change as quickly as Logan Cooley dekes out opposing goalies, and it might be a sign to the players in the Utah locker room about what kind of owners they're working for.

In an in-depth article detailing the team's move from Arizona to Utah, ESPN touched on how Ryan Smith has been working on making sure the players were comfortable with the move both on and off the ice.

Ahead of last week's fan party at the Delta Center, Ryan Smith made it known that he had hired a branding firm to help come up with a new team name and logo. He also alluded to a bracket-style system where fans will be able to vote on their favorite.

According to the article, Smith changed directions and is now making a push to come up with the team nickname ahead of the first year so players could "refer to themselves as something beyond 'Utah.'"

The article also touched on Smith's first interaction with his new team, taking the former Coyotes players on an outing to an Arizona golf course where he asked questions "about what they needed from the new franchise" after years of playing for a controversial owner inside a 5,000-seat arena.

"He was a real beauty. He gets it," the article quoted a player source when talking about Smith.

Utah players have reportedly expressed "genuine excitement" about the relocation and hope the move to solid ownership makes them an attractive franchise for free agents looking for a stable franchise.

Since the party, there's been no word on when the nickname bracket contest will be activated for fans. As of this week, nine nicknames have been trademarked by an LLC that is reportedly connected to the Smith Entertainment Group.