


[Print Page](#)

## On track for the Navy

By ANDREW SEIDLER - aseidler@kcchronicle.com

 Comments (No comments posted.)

Alex Jackson pondered the question for a moment.

“Do you want the pretty version, or the not-so-pretty version?” he said.

The “not-so-pretty version” of Jackson’s past year, spent as a post-graduate at the Naval Academy Preparatory School, was, well, not so pretty.

“I absolutely hated it. I hated every, single minute of it,” Jackson said Tuesday from Annapolis, Md., the day before beginning his “Plebe summer,” an intensive 5 1/2 week indoctrination program to life at the United States Naval Academy where Jackson currently is preparing for his first year.

“I’d never worked so hard in my life and gotten so little in return. ... At NAPS, they kick you when you’re down. ...

“And then you’re sitting on Facebook and seeing that your friends at [the University of Illinois] are having a great time. It was tough. But I’m also glad for the experience. It definitely put things in perspective for me.”

A track standout at St. Charles East, Jackson placed third in Class AA in the 400 meters with a time of 47.66 as a senior in 2007. An in-state college track career at Illinois, Illinois-Chicago or Illinois State seemed likely.

Then a letter arrived in December 2006 from the Naval Academy track team. Ready to toss aside the missive and go on with his day, Jackson was convinced by East boys track coach Ben Provencher to consider Annapolis. Provencher’s cousin had gone the Naval Academy route and sung its praises.

“I just told him what my cousin had said – that it is not only a very honorable thing to do, but a great living, a respectable profession and a great service,” Provencher said. “And then just the things he’ll be able to see and do.”

One problem. Jackson hadn’t a clue what the Naval Academy was.

“At first I thought, ‘What am I going to do with the Navy?’” Jackson said. “But I started to look into it, researching every, little thing I could on every search engine imaginable. I started to see that the opportunities that the academy provides are far greater than any other school I was considering.

“People always ask me if I’m enlisting. This is totally different. This is like an Ivy League education.”

Still, Jackson’s parents admit they were shocked by their son’s college choice.

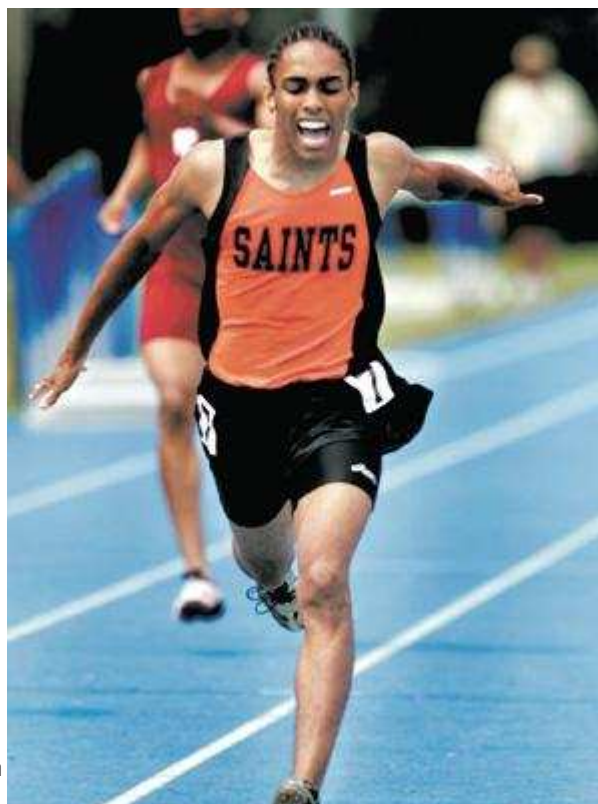
“It was totally out of the blue,” said Jackson’s mother, Cheryl, who will be allowed only three five-minute phone conversations with her son during the 5 1/2 weeks of orientation ahead. “We never thought he had ever showed any interest in the military. But Alex has always been adventurous and a leader.”

If not for track, though, Jackson said he never would have wound up in Annapolis.

“What brought us together was track. They recruited me. I never even considered the military, let alone the Naval Academy, prior to them contacting me,” Jackson said.

The facilities, including a state-of-the-art 200-meter indoor track with hydraulically controlled, banked curves, didn’t hurt.

“The new fieldhouse is, hands down, the best in the country,” Jackson said. “I was talking to [head coach Stephen Cooksey] and



he said teams from all over the country are drooling to come compete against us here. ... Being a Division I athlete has always been the plan, so I'm really looking forward to it."

Tom Friel, a close friend of Jackson's dating back to their days on the East football and track teams, expressed excitement about his former teammate's path.

"I was surprised when I heard at first, but I think it really works for him," Friel said. "The most incredible thing about him is his work ethic. He was always a very talented athlete, but that work ethic allowed him to excel."

As someone who didn't envision himself going down the military academy path until late in his senior year of high school, Jackson admitted he still hasn't fully wrapped his head around the journey he's begun.

He figures a day like today, the Fourth of July spent at the U.S. Naval Academy, will accelerate that process.

"I have a feeling," Jackson said, "it'll start to hit home on the Fourth."

## COMMENTS

*The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of NWHerald.com or Shaw Newspapers.*

[x] Close Window

Copyright © 2008 NorthWest Herald. All rights reserved.