



## Weekend of thrills at state track finals

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Published: 6/3/2009 12:01 AM

CHARLESTON - It's interesting to look back on athletes' comments after their Friday preliminaries, to see how they pan out in Saturday's finals.

For example, in 2008 West Aurora's Aviance King high-jumped 6 feet, 5 inches in the Class AA preliminaries. In finals the next day he had to settle for seventh place at 6-4.

Last Friday in Charleston King went 6-5 again in Class 3A preliminaries.

"I'm looking to do a little bit more damage than last year," he said.

In an event won by East Aurora's Jamario Taylor at 7 feet, King tied for fifth at 6-8.

"I did a little bit of damage," the junior said. "I was hoping to get around top-five, which I did. I was trying to compete with Jamario and bring one-two back to Aurora. I matched my PR (personal record), I can't ask for any more.

There was Batavia's Bai Kabba. He could have vied for mythical "man of the meet" honors after three all-state (top nine) finishes: eighth in the 100-meter dash, first in the 400, and his electrifying anchor leg of the 1,600 relay in which he passed six runners to lift the Bulldogs to second place.

Friday, he battled rising temperatures on the blue track of O'Brien Stadium, as well as two officials' guns, one for a warning, the other for a false start.

"They kill me every time," the St. Ambrose football and track recruit said.

"I definitely had a lot taken out of me coming down that last 100, so I'm going to have to definitely hydrate way better tomorrow because it's supposed to be the same thing, if not hotter."

The sun was out Saturday, but the temperatures were moderate. It was Kabba that was hotter.

Practice makes near-perfect: Senior Drew Denslake ran the second leg of Batavia's 1,600 relay. Andy Thomas led off, and Erich Zeddies handed the baton to Kabba in an all-senior lineup.

"We've been training since early February, late January, and last year, the end of the year, we saw the potential for us four," Denslake said after Kabba crossed the finish line in 3 minutes, 18.90 seconds.

"We kind of had a setback with Erich's knee (injury), but he recovered great. We finally started to click at sectionals (a sixth-seeded 3:20.95) and every week it's been getting down. These last two days have been amazing."

Fun, schmun: Geneva junior shot putter Frank Boenzi was disgusted with his throws, which topped out at "only" a distance of 56 feet, 4 inches in Friday's preliminaries - still good for an all-state sixth-place finish in 3A.

So it was amusing when after the good-natured Division I football prospect said his performance "(ticked) him off," he added: "I'm supposed to be doing this for fun."

Another area thrower was more forgiving of himself.

"It's nice to get on the medal stand," said University of Wisconsin-Platteville-bound all-stater Kevin Costin of West Aurora, who three weeks prior won both shot put and discus at the DuPage Valley Conference meet.

"I wish I would have thrown better today," Costin said, "but I appreciated how I came down here and competed well."

What comes around goes around: Wes Allen was a sophomore on St. Charles East's state-qualifying 1,600 relay in 2007. Both Allen and Luke Ploszek ran on the Saints' 800 relay that made it downstate that year.

They had mentors then, seniors like Keenen Sellers, Mike Jacobsmeyer, Travis Nier and two-time all-state 400 runner Alex Jackson.

This season, Ploszek and Allen were themselves the mentors. They teamed with sophomores Dillon Mugge and Mike Brown on a state-qualifying 800 relay.

"That's how me and Luke were," said Allen, who is going to play football at Truman State.

"We came down our sophomore year with two other older guys. Had a blast, got to see what happened. And that was kind of the motivation to get down here again. For them to be down here to race, to see what happens - and just to have another chance, it's pretty awesome."

The Saints' 800 relay didn't make it to Saturday, but Allen appreciated his sophomore partners.

"They did a phenomenal job this year," Allen said. "They're going to do something next year. If they can get two more guys to fill our spots they'll be great. But even without us they're going to do something."

By the way, Ploszek - like Allen, polite as a young man can be - is going to study entrepreneurial business at Missouri. He said he'd run track "if the opportunity presents itself."

"Track is the love of my life right now," said Ploszek, whose older brother Pete placed sixth in both the 2005 Class AA 100 and 200 dashes. "If I can hold onto it one year longer or one day longer, it's worth it to me."

Fifth in the 800, first in wit: Aurora Christian senior Dylan Melody made up for his 2008 downstate appearance in the 800, in which he had stated "he choked."

Melody, chasing the Class 1A record of 1 minute, 51.22 seconds established Saturday by North Shore Country Day's Peter Callahan, finished fifth in the 800 finals with a personal-best time of 1:58.09.

Melody, who will run at Waubensee Community College for a year, said he wanted to set a more palatable pace.

"My goal was to get out in front and slow down," he said. "That would make them run my race. But they didn't take the bait."

Feel the lingo: Nick Sinon became the latest all-stater in a Kaneland program steeped in high jump. Sinon's 6-foot-7 finish, third place in Class 2A, was done the old fashioned way: using technique known only to those in the trade.

"I had good back arch, my hips were high, just riding it," the junior said. "I had a little time getting my mark down."

Feel free to contact Knights coach Eric Baron for a translation. Or schematic.

Baron, by the way, likes the new three-class system in track.

"We're excited," the coach said. "With three classes it's such a godsend for so many communities. It's got people fired up about sports."

The best-laid plans: St. Charles North senior Max Clink knew he was among a loaded field in the 800, among the most anticipated 3A events in Charleston. Conant's Jeff Thode, Barrington's Ryan Mangone, Waubonsie Valley's Emmett Lorenz and Collinsville's Dominique Manley all had sub-1:55 sectional times.

But after Clink saw a little too much separation from the leaders, he said, "I feel like I might have waited a bit too long (to go after it). I had a feeling those guys would 'die.'

Still, asked if he would have changed his tactics the three-time all-stater said he wouldn't have.

"No, I think I would have done it the same. I was pretty happy with how it went."

As a sophomore, Clink placed eighth in the AA 800 at 1:56.77. Last season he ran on the North Stars' winning 3,200 relay with fellow senior Steve Miller, who was in Charleston rooting on his teammate. Saturday Clink ran fourth in the

800 with a time of 1:54.30.

"It wasn't exactly what I had in mind," Clink said of the event, "but I ran my race, that's all I had to do."

More distance demons: In 2008, Geneva's 3,200 relay featured senior Storm Obuchowski heading juniors Drew Hickey, Andrew Nelson and Chris Higgins.

This year, with Obuchowski graduated from that third-place team, Jake Tauscher joined to create an all-senior unit that placed second only to a Waubonsie Valley squad that broke its school record by 7 seconds.

Geneva's time of 7:45.86, in fact, would have won the Class AA 3,200 relay last season.

"We figured we could stay in contention for the first two legs (Higgins and Hickey), and kind of build a lead for Jake so he could hold it and then see what happens the second half. The first half we were right in contention, Drew got the lead to Jake," Nelson said.

"We put Jake in a tough position having to lead, especially on a windy day. He ran excellent. He pushed through the wind the first lap and Waubonsie Valley came on very strong.

"Jake split excellent, you've got to hand it to him - fist time in state running, first time down here," Nelson said. "He stepped up big for us. He got me the baton in second and I just finished what they got me."

Kudos: To graduating seniors Josh Bloome (pole vault) and Paul Davies (3,200) of Kaneland; Marmion sprinter Alex Rindone and distance runner Andrew Larsen - fourth in Class 3A 3,200 - and West Aurora sprinters Markus Cocroft, Steve McMullen, Darron Guyton, Leon Spears and the indomitable Josh Zinzer, winner of the Class 3A 200 and, really, nearly anything he put his mind to.

You'll be missed.