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Triple time for Kabba, Markuson

Batavia, Kaneland standouts make finals in 3 events apiece at IHSA state meet

CHARLESTON – False starts factor in to both of Bai Kabba's sports at Batavia.

They cost the offense five yards in football, but in track false starts can mean your sanity.

A technical malfunction halted Kabba the first time in the 400 meters Friday at the IHSA State Boys Track and Field Meet before fellow competitor Darius Bell of Normal West twitched in the next lane over.

"They killed me," Kabba said. "They killed me every time."

Kabba competed in three other preliminaries at the IHSA Class 3A State Track Meet and claims they hardly fazed him. By that logic, he took ninth in the 100 meters and helped anchor a heat-winning 4x400 relay team with a clear head. Same for the 4x100 that was unable to reach today's finals.

Things changed by the time the 400 eventually took off. Kabba still sensed pressure even after winning his heat in 47.91 seconds to make his top seed time stand up.

"With the 400, it's one of those races where everybody knows who you are on the track," Kabba said.

Public address announcer Matt Piescinski sees to that for each state-bound athlete, and he'll call the name of Kaneland junior Logan Markuson just as often as Kabba's today. Qualifying in four events himself, Markuson advanced to the Class 2A finals in the pole vault, 110 hurdles and 300 hurdles.

"He's the real deal," Knights coach Eric Baron said. "He's a kid that I think you'll see a lot next year in the finals, as well."

Six other Chronicle-area athletes and one relay team will shoot for state titles today, including Kaneland pole vaulter Josh Bloome and high jumper Nick Sinon in 2A.

Geneva senior Andrew Nelson highlights the 3A field. Outkicking a seven-athlete pack in the final lap, the senior took his heat of the 1,600 in 4:16.71 after anchoring the 4x800 relay to a fifth-seeded time of 7:52.91.

Classmates Chris Higgins, Jake Tauscher and Drew Hickey will join him in their final race together.

"We survived again and we'll see if we can't put everything together and get what we've been dreaming for," Nelson said.

Teammate Frank Boenzi enters the shot put finals seeded seventh in the 12-member field with a throw of 56-4, a mark that trails leader Dan Block of Lake Park by nearly six feet.

Boenzi was kept out of the discus finals in part due to Block, who saw his state-record 196-5 effort fall after standing for only a few minutes. Huntley junior Marcus Popenfoose wowed a growing crowd with a new standard of 199-8.

Marmion senior Andrew Larsen, the Chronicle's 2008 boys cross country runner of the year, was the lone Cadet to advance. He will aim for a distance double, running in the finals of the 1,600 and 3,200.

St. Charles North senior Max Clink moved on to the finals in one of two events, securing a spot in the 800 before anchoring a 4x400 team that missed qualifying by just less than two seconds.

A delayed baton exchange between Jack Skelton and Steve Miller bridging the second and third legs slowed the North Stars, who still managed a personal-best time of 3:22.58.

"I'm not blaming Jack or myself at all," Miller said. "It's not anybody's fault because we didn't mean for it to happen."

Crosstown rival St. Charles East missed the finals in its lone event, the 4x200 relay. The hobbled quartet of Mike Brown, Wes Allen, Dillon Mugge and Luke Ploszek competed together for only the second time all season – sectionals was the first – as injuries troubled the team since the indoor season.

"It was such a fast field out there," Allen said. "Just to get down here after the season that we had was tremendous."

Allen chose to compete in track to stay in shape for football, which isn't uncommon among sprinters at state. He wouldn't even have to venture out of the Tri-Cities to find company.

Exhaling before retreating to the dorms for an evening of relaxation, Kabba suggested he was "tricked" into running four years ago.

"Personally, I hate track," he smiled, "but don't tell my coach."

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