

Sports

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Falcon foursome takes state title

Farmington relay team performs in record time

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Farmington High School has long had a reputation for excellence in track and field, and the Falcons enhanced that image Saturday at the Class A state championship meet.

Two seniors — both All-Americans — and a pair of quality juniors combined their exceptional running abilities to capture first place in the 3,200-meter relay with a record-breaking performance.

Chris Inch and Al Stebbins, the seniors whose names are synonymous with excellence in both cross country and track, concluded their high school careers in perfect style as they were joined by Ron Smedley and Brandon London in composing the formidable relay squad.

The Falcon foursome, with each member running 800 meters, broke away from the field early and recorded a 7:48.5 time, nearly two seconds better than the time (7:50.02) set just one year ago by Detroit's Murray-Wright, which was runner-up to Farmington this year with a 7:51.0 showing.

"IT'S A COACH'S dream to have four kids who can put together a relay team like that," said Falcon coach Dave Catherman, who gave much of the credit for prepping the athletes to veteran distance coach Jerry Young.

"The parents and supporters at the state meet had one of the greatest thrills you can have in track and field. It reinforced the sense of pride we have in Farmington's track tradition."

That tradition stretches back to 1957-59 when Rex Cawley was a two-time state champ in the long jump and hurdles. He later won a gold medal in the 400-meter intermediate hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.

More recently, Nat Durham was the first high school pole vaulter in Michigan to go over 15 feet while

boys track

winning the 1972 state title, and Stebbins and Inch have followed in the footsteps of Mike McGuire, another All-American runner who was the state's 1973 two-mile champion.

In writing Farmington's latest chapter of track and field accomplishments, Smedley ran the initial leg in 1:58.0 and was just five yards off the lead at the completion.

LONDON GAVE the Falcons a five-yard edge by running 1:58.0 on the second leg, and Inch stretched it to a 20-yard advantage after turning in a 1:57.0 time in the third phase.

Finally, Stebbins shut the door with the best split time of the four, a 1:55.0 clocking, which enabled Farmington to finish the race with a 30-yard lead over the Pilots of Murray-Wright.

Like a well-oiled machine, the Falcons executed the race with extreme precision, said Catherman, explaining Farmington's success was the result of a "a strong leadoff, an aggressive second man, a great runner in the third position who knows how to maintain pace and an anchorman with an unbeatable attitude."

"Brandon London gave us the lead, and Chris just stretched it open," he said. "With an anchor runner like Alan Stebbins, it was all over. It would have taken a jet to catch him."

Catherman added the knowledge of Stebbins' outstanding ability to finish off a relay was a source of inspiration and encouragement for the first three runners.

"THE OTHERS knew, if they got it close, Alan would win it," he said. "You can't have a successful relay

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington High School's state championship relay team consisted of Brandon London (seated), Alan Stebbins (standing, from left), Ron Smedley and Chris Inch. The Falcons not only won the 3,200-meter relay at Saturday's Class A track and field

championships but set a meet record in the process. The four-some defeated runnerup Detroit Murray-Wright, which set the old record last year. Stebbins and Inch are seniors and All-Americans, Smedley and London are juniors.

Hold on, champs, to those 'Glory Days'

I had a friend who was a big baseball player back in high school. He could throw that fastball by you. Make you look like a fool boy. Saw him the other night at this roadside bar. I was walking in and he was walking out. We went back inside sat down, had a few drinks but all he kept talking about was

Glory days well they'll pass you by. Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye

Glory days, glory days
— Bruce Springsteen
Glory Days

JUST ANOTHER WEEKEND of high school sports, right? Ho-hum. Ho, ho.

This was no ordinary weekend, this one just gone by. It was special, a weekend of major consequence, with major implications, for athletes throughout our state.

It was a state championship weekend. Top athletes got their



C.J. Risak

chance to prove they were the best. Girls track. Boys track. Girls soccer. Boys tennis. Teams wagging single fingers while boasting, "We're No. 1!" had their claims

challenged. "Prove it," upstarts demanded.

Some did. Others didn't. Dilution can dampen a state title's meaning. Thirteen were

handed out last weekend in the various classes. Naming just the Class A winners in each sport would be nearly impossible for anyone outside the MHSAA's offices.

That's a shame, because such a feeling tends to downplay a state title's importance to those who count most: the athletes.

THEY DON'T KNOW. They don't really understand. Not now, not at this moment in their lives. The school year is at an end, and high schoolers are looking forward

to a three-month summer vacation. Graduates are anxiously anticipating college or are busy formulating job plans. All are eagerly looking ahead to a future full of promise.

That is as it should be. No one should be denied the bubbly optimism of youth.

But such optimism often carries a heavy price — the present. Kids view their present-day goals as nice, yeah, but there are bigger prizes out there. A state title today,

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Regional softball

Mercy 9 tangles with Hazel Park

By Brad Emons
staff writer

Two state powerhouses will collide Saturday in the first round of the Class A softball regional at Hazel Park's Green Acres.

The unbeaten Garden City Cougars (27-0) tangle with Temperance-Bedford (37-2) in the opener at 10 a.m.

But a team that could cause some damage along the way is Farmington Hills Mercy (17-8), a team loaded with underclassmen. The Marlins will face host Hazel Park (16-12) in the other semifinal, beginning approximately at noon followed by the finals at 2:30 p.m.

"I haven't seen Bedford play, but they were rated high all last season and this season," said GC first-year coach Barry Patterson. "All I know is that they started seven sophomores two years ago when they lost to Livonia Franklin in the regional final."

"I expect to see a senior club and I've heard they're solid from top to bottom."

LAST WEEK in the district semifinals, Garden City got a big scare from Westland John Glenn before rallying for a 5-4 win. The Cougars

softball

then went on to beat Detroit Mackenzie for the title, 13-3.

But the Cougars, Patterson admits, were far from being in tournament form. They committed four errors.

"I still feel we're one of the better teams in the state defensively even though we didn't show it on Saturday," he said.

Patterson said he expects a low-scoring game with Bedford.

"If we hit, we'll have a good shot at winning it," said the Garden City coach.

The top run-producer for the senior-laden Garden City team this season has been first baseman Terri Paul (30 RBI). But not far behind are right fielder Mary Hebert (20) and second baseman Denise Kokowicz (28).

The team's top two hitters have been center fielder Karen Sandmen (407) and shortstop Mikey Gorak (404). The two also lead the team in runs scored.

PATTERSON WILL START pitch-

er Shelly Malone, sporting a 15-0 record. The Garden City coach, however, said he wouldn't know if Malone would start again in the second game if the Cougars beat Bedford.

Another quality pitcher available for the title, 13-3, is senior Kristin Wasi (12-0) who alternated with Malone most of the season.

"I have no hesitation of going to her (Wasi), but I'm not sure right now whether I'd pitch Shelly in the second game," Patterson said. "It depends how she feels and how tired she is."

Malone suffered an elbow injury at the end of last season, prompting Patterson to rest his ace more frequently this year.

Patterson said Malone has not lost any velocity.

"She hasn't picked up any more speed, but she throws just as hard as she did last year," said Patterson. "Shelly's location has been good most games even though John Glenn made contact against her. But she's a smart pitcher who works the inside and outside of the plate."

MERCY, MEANWHILE, has an ace of its own in sophomore pitcher

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