

Joens carries family legacy in discus

Written by Jim Ecker

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Sam Joens carries more than a discus when he competes for the Cedar Rapids Prairie track team. He carries a family legacy.

A member of the Joens family began throwing the discus at Prairie more than 30 years ago. They've been good, too.

Sam's father, Scott Joens, holds the school record in the discus. Jake Joens, one of Sam's uncles, won a state title.

Craig Joens, another uncle, also threw at Prairie. So did two of Sam's aunts, Sara and Angie, and so did his sister, Amy. A bunch of cousins have thrown, too. Sara held the women's record in the discus at one time, until a cousin (Holly) broke it.

Sam Joens is the latest, and he's sustaining the family's proud tradition in the event. He finished sixth at the Class 4A state meet last year as a junior and currently ranks second in the state with a heave of 170 feet, 6 inches.

His father set the school record at 185 feet, 4 inches in 1982 and it's stood for 29 years. Sam wants to break that mark, but needs another 15 feet.

"That's what I'm aiming for," he said Tuesday. "He wants me to break it as much as I do."

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Scott Joens thought Sam might have a shot at the record at the Prairie Relays on Tuesday, but the meet got rained out. Sam has won five discus titles this spring, but he hasn't had a chance to really cut loose on a warm, breezy day.

"My goal was that Sam would break my record so people would quit asking me about it," Scott Joens said. "That would be awesome. That would be my dream come true for my son."

Sam Joens has won discus titles this spring at the J-Hawk Relays (163-0), the Hollingsworth Relays (170-6), the Wilkinson Relays (161-9 1/2), the North Scott Invitational (159-0) and a meet in Ames this past Saturday (170-4 1/2).

Justin Baker of Sioux City Heelan leads the state at 178-0, so Joens is chasing him, chasing his father's school record and chasing his Uncle Jake's state title.

The Joens family has another tradition in track and field. Scott and three of his siblings - Doug, Jake and Sara - all competed at the University of Iowa, and Sam plans to uphold that tradition as well. He has signed with the Hawkeyes and will join them next season.

Sam will throw the discus at Iowa, but he also might take a shot at the decathlon. He competed in all four prep field events at a meet earlier this year - discus, shot put, high jump, long jump - and also has done the hurdles and running events. He'd have to add the javelin and pole vault in order to become a decathlete in college, but he's thinking about it.

At 6-foot-3 and 185 pounds, he's got a good frame for a decathlete and room to grow. He's talked to the Iowa track coaches about it and could give it a try.

"They've joked about it to me a little bit. My dad has, too," he said. "Yeah, I'll try it. I would definitely give it a shot if I could."

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Scott Joens and his wife, Robin, run Somersault Gymnastics in southwest Cedar Rapids, and Sam participated in gymnastics when he was younger, something that could help in the pole vault. "He's kind of fearless when it comes to flipping upside down," Scott Joens said.

Sam's sister, Amy, was a gymnast, and she participated in the pole vault for a while at the University of Northern Iowa.

The decathlon could be in Sam's future, but he's currently focused on the discus. In a perfect world, Sam would break his father's record and match his Uncle Jake with a state title in Des Moines next month.

"That would make me and a bunch of other people really happy and proud," Scott Joens said. "Very, very proud."