

J-Hawks smash record in 4x200 relay

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - The Cedar Rapids Jefferson girls trained in the rain. They ran in the snow. They pushed themselves in the weight room. They worked hard in the pool.

It all paid off Friday.

Abbie Ranschau, Jasmine Blue, Morgan Meese and Lucy Schneekloth shattered the all-time record in the 4x200 relay and captured the event for the third straight year at the Class 4A state meet in Des Moines.

Jefferson was clocked in 1 minute, 39.24 seconds, chopping 1.7 seconds off the all-time best that Jefferson set at the state meet in 2013.

"Every single day after school, we're on the track, in the weight room, in the pool," said Jasmine Blue. "We're working hard all the time.

"We want to win," she said. "We want to be the best."

Blue and Schneekloth ran on the 4x200 relay for Jefferson as youngsters in 2013 when they submitted the previous all-time best of 1:40.94. They were determined to go even faster this time and crack 1 minute, 40 seconds.

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"From the beginning of the season, we've had that number in our minds," said Schneekloth. "We can go below 1:40, we can do it."

Ranschau, Blue, Meese and Schneekloth won the 4x200 relay at the state meet last year, but did not set any records. They were disappointed in themselves last season -- the state title apparently was not enough -- and took care of unfinished business Friday.

"It just feels like all the hard work we've done all season -- all those intervals and running in the rain and snow, it's just all worth it," said Ranschau.

The quartet will be heavily favored to win the 4x100 relay Saturday, then they'll be breaking up. Schneekloth and Meese are seniors, so Ranschau and Blue -- both juniors -- will need to find new partners in 2016.

Meese will be running at Coe College next. Schneekloth wasn't sure she wanted to run in college, but has decided to join the team at Iowa State as a walk-on and as a member of the academic honors program.

"I can't give this up. I can't do it," said Schneekloth. "It was a good day when I made that decision."



The J-Hawks are fast, of course, but there's more to their success than mere speed. They have

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a cohesive unit, built on friendship and trust, and they have a special weapon with their "high" handoffs that lets them see the baton at eye-level for fast starts.

The other teams use a "low" handoff near the hip and have to slow down.

Not Jefferson. "I'm surprised nobody has caught on yet," said Blue.

Meese thinks the J-Hawks can smash the Iowa all-time best in the 4x100 relay Saturday. These same four girls run on the 4x100 and they currently share the all-time mark at 47.55 seconds, set at the Drake Relays last month.

"We'd better," said Meese smiling, "or we're not going home with Coach Calloway."

Jefferson Coach Bill Calloway has called this quartet "the best group" he's ever had at the school during his long tenure as head coach. They proved it again Friday.