

## Evans, Jenks strike gold at Drake Relays

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Josh Evans and Stephanie Jenks turned the 104th Drake Relays into a golden showcase for Linn-Mar High School Saturday afternoon in Des Moines.

Evans, a junior who had to rest his ailing back for more than two months this winter, captured the 1600 meter run by a wide margin and shattered a meet record that had stood for 34 years.

Jenks, a freshman who has quickly established herself as the distance running queen of Iowa, collected a gold medal in the 1500 run Saturday after taking the 3000 on Thursday.

"I'm really happy about that," she said softly, emphasizing each word with a smile.

Jenks sliced more than five seconds off her previous best and won the 1500 in 4 minutes, 35.22 seconds, beating Karissa Schweizer of Dowling Catholic by more than two seconds.

Evans toed the starting line just a few minutes after Jenks crossed the finish line in victory, setting the stage for an historic double for the Lions.

Evans figured he had to whip Jason Thomas of Dowling Catholic, the pre-race favorite, in order to claim the race and he decided to make a bold move on the third lap and go for the lead.

"For me, that's my strength," said Evans. "The third lap is the hardest mentally in the race. You still have half the race to go."

Evans took a commanding lead on the third lap and was never challenged again, his strategy working perfectly. He had more than enough power to keep the lead on the final lap.

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"I was just praying: 'God, give me strength.' He did and I was able to pull that one off," said Evans.

"I knew Jason Thomas was coming, I knew somebody had to be coming. I couldn't wait for them."

Evans was clocked in 4 minutes, 10.86 seconds, topping the former mark of 4:11.57 set by Steve Greiner of Pekin in 1979 and slicing about six seconds off his previous best.

Evans credited his renewed good health, beautiful weather and good competition for spurring him to the record.

"I thought I had a shot at it," he said. "I knew it had all the parts. I just had to push it myself."

Evans and Thomas have developed a friendly rivalry in cross country and track.

"My goal was to give him a race for his money," said Evans. "I wasn't sure if I could have enough to beat him. That kid is fast. He's the real deal. I just wanted to push him."

Evans placed second in the 3200 run on Thursday and helped Linn-Mar win the 4x200 relay on Friday, so he's going home with two gold medals and a silver this year.

Evans was given a Drake Relays championship flag and took a victory lap around the Blue Oval after taking the 1600, stopping along the way to oblige a young track fan with an autograph.

"That was kind of weird. I'm not that big of a deal still," he said. "Maybe that kid will grow up and run like this someday. That would be kind of cool."

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Jenks, normally unflappable, admitted to being nervous before her 1500. "I was kind of getting the butterflies," she said. "As soon as the gun went off I was fine."

Jenks anticipated having a battle with Rebekah Topham of Griswold, the 2012 Drake Relays champion in the 1500, but Topham stayed in the back of the pack and was never a factor in the race, finishing seven seconds behind Jenks.

"I had a couple of strategies going into here," said Jenks, but that changed when Topham stayed in the rear. "I thought if she's going to sit there, I'm going to go out with the leaders."

Jenks made her big move with about 300 meters left in the race, at roughly the same spot where she made her move in the 3000 on Thursday. It worked perfectly again.

A sellout crowd of 14,504 witnessed the proceedings, attracted by an elite field of international, college and high school athletes.