

Kyle Dunn eyes 3 state titles

Written by Jim Ecker

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Most guys would be delighted to win two state titles in a single year, but Kyle Dunn isn't like most guys.

He wanted three titles last year.

Dunn won the 400-meter hurdles and the 400-meter dash at the 2010 state track meet, but he was upset in the 110-meter high hurdles by Xavier's Ryan Sander and finished second in that event. He wants to make amends this year.

"Obviously a big goal for me is the 110 highs," he said. "It's kind of escaped from me the last two years."

Dunn placed fourth in the 110 hurdles as a sophomore. He was the premier high hurdler in the state last year as a junior and beat Sander all season, until the very end.

"I was pretty disappointed. I really wanted that," he said. "We had been racing all year long, but that was actually the first time I lost to him all year."

Dunn has signed to run track at the University of Arkansas, but he has some unfinished business before he joins one of the top college programs in the country. He wants to win all three races this season - the 400, 400 hurdles and 110 highs - both for himself and the Lions.

He thinks Linn-Mar has a strong team, and winning three individual titles could help the Lions capture the Class 4A title.

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"I think with our team this year, we can definitely do something big at state," he said. "I think this is the most complete team we've had so far in my high school career, and I know the coaches are talking the same way."

The Lions placed fourth at the state meet last year behind Cedar Rapids Washington, Indianola and Pleasant Valley.

Dunn wants to win the 110 hurdles to finish his personal trifecta, but it's not his favorite event. "I'd have to say the 400 hurdles," he remarked. "It's the hardest race (of the three), but it's the one I have the most fun with."

"It's easy to make gains if you can get your steps down and get the right strategy. You can really see or feel the difference between race to race, which is kind of hard to do if you're just sprinting a lot, like the 400 or the 110 hurdles."

Arkansas has recruited him primarily for the 400 hurdles, but he also might run a leg on the 4x400 relay for the Razorbacks and try the 110 hurdles. He signed with Arkansas last fall, which was kind of a surprise.

"I hadn't thought about Arkansas until pretty late in the recruiting process, as far as setting up all my visits," he said. "I think they were pretty much the last visit I set up. I wasn't really thinking about them until the visit. The visit really got me."

He said the track facilities at Arkansas were "a huge draw," but he also was delighted to learn he could major in computer science there. Until then, he was leaning toward Stanford or Illinois. He also visited Iowa and Baylor.

From middle school jumper to high school hurdler

Dunn ran track in middle school, but didn't become a hurdler until he got to high school. Tim Stamp, the hurdles coach at Linn-Mar, saw Dunn as a freshman and had an idea. An excellent idea, as it turned out.

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"When Kyle came to us, he was a long jumper in middle school," said Stamp, who was a hurdler at Cedar Rapids Washington ('76) and the University of Northern Iowa. "When I see a guy who's a long jumper and has some size and a little bit of speed, I usually try to make him into a hurdler."

Dunn remembers it clearly.

"He just kind of picked me out of the pack and was like, 'I think we can turn you into something,'" he recalled. "I wasn't too keen on the idea originally, but I've just been his little puppet, and he's molded me into what I've been today."

Dunn said "puppet" with appreciation.

"He's really gotten me off on the right foot, has me training and excited about running track and being the best I can be," he said. "He's done a great job."

Stamp said Dunn ran a 49.97 split on a 400 medley leg as a freshman in 2008, which caught his attention.

"I could see that he was probably going to be one of the best that ever ran in the state," said Stamp. "I thought he could be as good as Joey Woody, if not better, from that freshman year."

Woody starred at Iowa City High and the University of Northern Iowa, then was successful on the international track circuit as well.

Dunn's best prep times are 51.41 in the 400 hurdles, 48.33 in the open 400 and 14.20 in the 110 hurdles. Stamp thinks Dunn has a shot at breaking the all-time state record of 50.96 in the 400 hurdles set by Dustin Avey of Ames in 1996.

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"The sky's the limit right now"

"I want to improve on all my times," said Dunn. "I try to think that the sky's the limit right now. I had probably the best offseason. I'm coming into this track season feeling better than I ever have. I'm really hoping that I can see those times click at the end of the year."

Dunn and a half-dozen of his teammates trained during the winter in the indoor facilities at Cornell College and the University of Iowa. He's healthy and ready to tackle the outdoor season, unlike a year ago when he battled a foot injury.

Dunn, who stands 6-foot-2, trimmed some "body fat" since last season and now weighs 165, which he thinks is ideal. "As a track runner, the wirier you are, the easier it is," he said.

Dunn is not the only outstanding hurdler at Linn-Mar. Brandon Ophoff, a junior, distinguished himself during the indoor track season this month, tying Dunn in the 60 hurdles at one meet and beating him in another.

The Lions have another premier hurdler in Nick Lucas, a senior who placed fourth in the 400 low hurdles last season.

Linn-Mar has talent in many other events as well, leading to high expectations. "There are definitely big things in store if we can do what we're supposed to do," said Dunn.

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