

Stamp builds top hurdlers at Linn-Mar

Written by Tom Fruehling
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This year's Drake Relays will mark a milestone for Linn-Mar hurdles coach Tim Stamp.

He'll be there with one of the favorites to win the boys events, Lion senior Brandon Ophoff, and he'll be following his star hurdler from last year, state champ Kyle Dunn, now a freshman on the perennial powerhouse Arkansas track and field contingent.

It's an unusual circumstance for an unusual coach whose career has been as circuitous as the blue oval track at Drake Stadium.

Stamp, 54, coached his first Drake Relays and Iowa high school state champion in his very first year of coaching at Clinton 30 years ago. He got out of the profession a year later when his teaching job was eliminated, and only got back into coaching 10 years ago when he offered to help Ken Hopkins, his Cedar Rapids childhood pal and the Linn-Mar head coach.

In the meantime, Stamp spent 17 years in the construction and real estate business that were lucrative enough that he "retired" at the age of 41.

"I decided then that I was only going to do what I really wanted to do," he said, "and what I really love to do. My passion is for teaching and coaching. And the hurdles are my addiction.

"I'm a teacher, and I'm here to teach guys how to hurdle."

He's so adept at it that no less an authority than Jefferson girls coach Bill Calloway, who has been coaching track for 38 years, called him "the finest hurdle coach in all of Iowa."

"Obviously, there's a lot of technique in hurdling," said Calloway, who was Stamp's track coach at Washington High School and is a longtime friend and biking buddy. "Tim has it all broken down. He studies it and sees things others don't see.

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“He knows what drills to do and when to do them. And the big thing is, he gets his kids to do it the right way.”

Although Stamp himself finished third in the state in the high hurdles in 1976, he and his old coach acknowledge that he possessed only average ability.

“He didn’t have a lot of speed, and it didn’t come easy for him,” said Calloway. “But even back then, Tim made the absolute most of what he had. He really worked hard at it. I think that’s what’s made him a pretty darned good coach.”

Stamp agreed fully with the man he calls his “mentor.”

“As a hurdler, I was OK. But I was always looking for better ways to do things, to find ways to beat the competition.

“I’m a detail-oriented person by nature. And I’m also very persistent. The hurdles are a skills event. If you know the proper techniques and work hard enough, you can be good at it.”

While most sprinters, for instance, are blessed with genetic advantages, Stamp termed his hurdlers “blue collar workers.”

“To be good,” he emphasized, “they really have to roll up their sleeves and work. The harder you work, the better you’ll be.

“In track, one-hundredth of a second can make all the difference. It’s the little things that can determine winners and losers.”

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While Linn-Mar has gained an enviable reputation in the past decade for its shuttle hurdle relay teams, having back-to-back elite runners in the same event is a rarity. Stamp said both Dunn and Ophoff, though dissimilar in some ways, prove his point that attitude and attention to detail pay off in their track speciality.

Dunn has more raw speed, but Ophoff more strength.

"The key is, they're both very efficient. They spend as little time in the air as possible. They keep contact with the ground," said Stamp.

For their part, both hurdle phenoms said Stamp has made them into winners, both on and off the track.

"I came into high school with kind of a chip on my shoulder," said Dunn, who may compete in as many as four events at Drake this weekend. "He saw something in me. He made me into a hurdler, but he made me into a better person, too. He's a life coach and a track coach."

Ophoff, who plans to study civil engineering and compete in the hurdles at Iowa State next year, credits his coach for his achievements in school as well as on the track.

"Coach Stamp is all about maximizing your potential. He's taught me that if you work hard in school or in the hurdles, anything is possible."

The coach himself, who returned to the classroom nine years ago to teach industrial technology at Oak Ridge Middle School, described himself as "a builder and a teacher."

"I built houses, and I build hurdlers. I'm passionate about sharing my knowledge. And I work extremely hard to teach my guys how to become successful. That's my mission."