

Jenks calls halt to triathlon career

Written by Jim Ecker

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Stephanie Jenks is one of the top triathletes in the world, but the Linn-Mar junior plans to stop competing in the demanding event to focus on her equally promising career as a distance runner.

"I'm actually putting triathletes aside until after college," Jenks said Saturday during the J-Hawk Relays at Kingston Stadium. "I'm focusing on college and I want to run in college."

She said she hopes to pick a college by the end of the year.

Jenks won the silver medal in the triathlon at the 2014 Junior Olympics in China last summer and was named the USA Junior Triathlete of the Year. She has competed internationally for several years in the grueling event, which consists of swimming, biking and running.

"It was really fun," she said, "but I know in the end, my passion is in running."

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Jenks set meet records in the 1500 and 3000 meter runs Saturday at the J-Hawk Relays and also won the 800. She holds the fastest times in the state in all three events this year as she heads toward the Drake Relays later this month.

Jenks has been the premier distance runner in the state ever since she burst onto the scene as a freshman two years ago.

She won the Class 4A state cross country title as a ninth grader and has won numerous championships at the Drake Relays and Class 4A state track meets. She is currently ranked No. 1 in the state in the 800 (2:14.38), 1500 (4:35.77) and 3000 (9:51.23).

Jenks is running on relays for Linn-Mar this year and might compete in relays at the Drake Relays and state meet for the first time in her career.

"It's a good possibility," she said. "It kind of depends on what Coach (Nathan) Hopp puts me in and what's best for the team. It's up to him.

"I really love relays," she said.

Jenks said she's had preliminary contacts with colleges through e-mails and Facebook, but the open recruiting season for current juniors does not begin until July 1.

"Right now I'm kind of looking and keeping my mind open," she said. "I hope to have it done by the end of the year."

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Jenks said the University of Washington, Oregon, Stanford and Arizona State have some of the top distance programs in the country, but did not indicate if she is leaning toward any school in particular.

Jenks suffered injuries to her lower back, right hip and right elbow in a mishap during the biking portion at an international triathlon in Canada last summer and took some time off to recover.

"I had some pretty bad pains and numbness," she said.

Jenks looked healthy and fit Saturday.

"It's a lot better than it was at the beginning of the season," she said. "We're still working with little things, but it's pretty much better."