

Jenks joins Drake elite with 8 titles

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Stephanie Jenks likes to stay near the finish line after she finishes a race to congratulate all the other runners for their hard work and effort.

She's done that quite a lot at the Drake Relays the past three years.

Jenks cruised to another victory in the 1500 meter run at the Drake Relays Saturday in 4:31.09 to join elite company at America's Track Classic with the eighth title of her career.

Jenks joined distance runners Katie Flood of Dowling Catholic (2007-10) and Shelby Houlihan of Sioux City East (2008-11) as the Iowa only high school girls in meet history with eight crowns.

Jenks also joined Houlihan as the only two girls in Drake Relays history to sweep the 800, 1500 and 3000 meter runs at one meet for the distance triple.

"They were both really, really great runners," said Jenks. "I still look up to them in college and I still follow them all the time, especially Shelby.

"I came back last night to watch her in the 800. It's not every day you get to see Shelby come back to Drake. It was really cool. I really loved watching her."

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Houlihan, a senior at Arizona State, placed sixth in a special women's 800 race Friday night. Flood, who ran at the University of Washington, was an NCAA champion during her college career.

Jenks has won all eight of her titles in individual events at Drake in the 800 (twice), 1500 (three times) and 3000 (three times). Flood and Houlihan won six individual titles at Drake and two other titles on relays, giving Jenks the most individual crowns in Drake history for a high school girl.



And Jenks is not done yet. She's still only a junior at Linn-Mar with another full year of competition in 2016. She could put the record out of sight with three or four more championships at Drake next year.

She was not ready to start thinking about the 2016 Drake Relays quite yet.

"It's still up in the air," she remarked. "I don't know what freshmen are coming in or anything. I'm just going to keep working and try to be good."

McKenzie Yanek of Pleasant Valley stayed fairly close to Jenks in the early stages of the 1500 Saturday, but faded after that. Jenks ended up beating Trina Moreno of Urbandale by 11.1 seconds for another comfortable victory on the famed blue oval in Des Moines.

Jenks began winning championship flags at Drake as a freshman in 2013 and has never stopped. She confessed that she began thinking about possible records back then as a ninth grader.

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"I think it might have been something I thought about my freshman year, but I'd kind of blown it off," she said. "I've just been trying to excel and do my best every year here."

Jenks has been credited with eight victories at Drake, but she actually finished second in the 800 last year and was later declared the champion when the winner (Kaley Ciluffo of Pleasant Valley) was declared ineligible.

This year, Jenks joined Houlihas as the only Iowa high school girls to claim the distance triple of 800, 1500 and 3000 on the track in the same meet. Houlihan did it as a senior in 2011.

"That was definitely a goal for me," said Jenks. "I knew the 800 was going to be my hardest race. It's something that's a little too quick, but I'm starting to get accustomed to it. The 1500 is my favorite."

Jenks won the 3000 by 30.86 seconds on Thursday, she took the 800 by 1.76 seconds on Friday and captured the 1500 by 11.1 seconds on Saturday.

Now it's Jenks, Flood and Houlihan at the top of the all-time charts.

"That's pretty exciting," she said. "I didn't know that until my mom texted me this morning and said she had read it somewhere. It's pretty exciting and I'm happy to be where those girls are."

Jenks finished her weekend at the Drake Relays by placing seventh in the 400 hurdles in 1:06.9. The hurdles are a new race for Jenks this spring and she plans to keep working at the event in hopes of making it her fourth race at the state meet next month.⁴

"I'm going to work on hurdles every day now," she said.