

Boys' track distance runners show potential

By Paige Happ

In past seasons, sprinting has been the Wildcats' strong suit in boys' track, and now the Wildcats look to expand their success in the distance races as the 2025 season opens.

"I am very excited for this season," said junior sprinter Colby Gast. "I think we have a great group of guys this year all around with sprints, distance, and hurdles. I think we will have a lot of success in the meets and all of the races."

Head Coach Daniel Knipfel sees great potential for his runners for the upcoming season.

"I see a lot of talent from underclassmen walking the halls of Durant," he said. "I think we could have several promising freshmen join the team and make an impact immediately. There are also talented upperclassmen that haven't joined yet that would do the same."

One of the reasons for optimism is the team's distance runners after a strong performance in the district cross country meet last November.

The Wildcats' cross country team had a significant 2024 season and just came up short by two spots from qualifying as a team for the state meet.

Senior Race Starr did qualify as an individual and took home 34th at the state meet. Freshman Aaron Garcia finished 11th at the district meet, which placed him just a few short steps from qualifying for the state meet.

"I think the distance races will be one of the most anticipated events for me next season," said Coach Knipfel. "Last season we saw all the distance runners achieve promising PRs. We still have to put up faster

times to be competitive, but I think the opportunity is there."

A star sprinter for the Wildcats, Charles Huesmann, competed in the state track meet in the 400-meter dash last year and finished in ninth place. He was also a key performer in the 4x400-meter relay that won a state title in 2023. He is now running for St. Ambrose University in Davenport.

"It will be tough to replace Charlie, but I also think that will be an opportunity for athletes to step into and try to continue keeping Durant competitive in the 400 meter," said Coach Knipfel.

The Wildcats also look for someone to fill in the spot that was once filled by graduate Caden Meyer. He and three seniors, Brady and Bryce Daufeldt and Conner Schwarz, were part of the shuttle hurdle relay team that qualified for state last season and finished 20th.

"I think we have a couple of options to turn to," said Coach Knipfel. "A few of the underclassmen could step in, or I may have a few athletes try out hurdles that I feel show promising athleticism in the event."

The lone returner from that 4x400-meter state title in 2023 is Gast who was out for about seven weeks with a pulled hamstring last season and did not qualify for the state meet in the 100-meter dash, his specialty.

"I would like to say it's fully healed, but there are definitely still times when it bothers me when doing hard sprints," said Gast.

Gast was ranked in the top three at the beginning of the 2024 seasons for the 100-meter dash before his injury occurred. Gast hopes to ultimately stay healthy and succeed in his races this season.

"It does worry me a little bit though because they say when you have something happen once with your hamstrings, it never really fully goes away," Gast said.

Coach Knipfel plans to take some precautions with Gast to insure a low risk of injury.

"Once we get into the season, we will focus on a rigid schedule of rest every day after meets and over the weekends to prevent injury," said Coach Knipfel.

Gast has been preparing for the season by training at Iowa Speed, a track club run by a coach at the University of Iowa, and will be running in an indoor meet at the University of Iowa in early March. But Coach Knipfel said Gast is "not overdoing anything with preseason training."

Gast runs every sprint including the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter dash, and the 400-meter dash. Gast was also a part of the 4x100-meter relay at the beginning of last season that broke the school record.

"I want to run the open 100 meter, 4x100-meter, and whatever else Coach Knipfel thinks will be best for the team," said Gast.

Gast sees himself focusing on the 100-meter dash the most.

"This is my favorite race because I get to utilize my block start to its fullest, and it provides the most excitement and adrenaline," he said. "I also really like the 4x100-meter because it involves a team that you can grow close to, and it's also a very exciting race."

Sitting out for seven weeks wasn't easy for Gast; however, it has left him even more motivated to be successful.

"Being out for that long was really difficult for me," he said. "I felt like I let



Photo by Nolan Williams

Senior Conner Schwarz competes in the 200-meter dash in the state track meet last year.

down my teammates in the relays I was a part of. It was very tough to watch my friends out there competing and me not being able to."

Another key runner for the Wildcats is Schwarz who qualified for the 200-meter dash at state last year and finished in 14th place.

Schwarz' goals are more of the same with striving to go back to state and compete at the Drake Relays.

"The main thing I want to accomplish is just making it to state and Drake," he said. "Also I'm gonna try to break the 200-meter dash school record."

Wildcat girls' sprint relays look to make a run at state meet

By Lauren Callison

After losing 11 graduates, and their three state-qualifying events, this season will be more of a group effort for the Durant girls' track team.

Graduates Kennedy Schumacher, Lainey Shelangoski, and Isabella Buesing each qualified for state last season: Schumacher in the open 400 meters, Shelangoski in the 400-meter hurdles, and Buesing in the wheelchair shot put.

"Each one brought different aspects to the team," said Head Coach Doug Frett. "Five of the seniors last year at some point in their track career participated at the state track meet."

Senior Emma Meincke, who ran in the 4x400-meter relay at state two years ago, is now the only returning Wildcat to have run at the state meet.

"It was my goal to make it to state, and when I finally got there, it just felt so surreal," said Meincke. "You're running with some of the best runners in the state."

With her experience, Meincke feels like she needs to become more of a leader in her last season.

"I have experience now, and I hope to help those younger girls achieve their goals," said Meincke.

The Wildcats had success with hurdles and individual races in past years, but with only one hurdler returning, Coach Frett believes the relays will be their main focus.

"Sprint relays look to be our strong area this year," he said. "We have girls waiting to fill spots or challenge for a spot on both relay teams. This helps to make the team stronger with some competition."

The only returning hurdler is senior

Mariah Alpen, an alternate on the shuttle hurdle relay team that made it to state two years ago.

"As the only returning hurdler, I'm going to focus a lot on hurdling, and I think I can help lead the team with advice and encouragement for my teammates," said Alpen.

Meincke is also looking to try hurdles this season.

"These past couple of years we lost most of our hurdlers," said Meincke. "I'm hoping that maybe I can step up and fill in an empty spot in the shuttle hurdle."

Last year, at the district meet the 4x400-meter and the 4x200-meter relays just barely missed the cut. Most of the relay runners return this year, including sophomore Elise Jones, who was a part of both and has been working hard in the offseason.

"I have been doing Iowa Speed Clinics this winter to train," said Jones. Being so close to state last year in their races pushes Jones and Meincke.

"I'm hoping that after the letdown last year of just barely missing the cutoff to make it to state, it will push me and my teammates to work harder," said Meincke.

"This being my senior season gives me the mindset that I just have to leave it all on the track."

The Wildcats embrace the state tradition the program has established.

"We have had great success in track and field for many years," said Coach Frett. "The girls come into the program and want to keep the tradition going, and I have been blessed to have had great athletes who have participated for me since taking over the program."

Raynor Door's girls' track athlete of the month



2370 West Lake Blvd.
Davenport, IA 52804
563.391.9566 – phone
www.raynorqc.com

Sophomore Elise Jones has been running track since the fourth grade. Jones runs the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter dash, the 4x200-meter relay, and the 4x400-meter relay. She has been training at Iowa Speed during the offseason hoping to improve her times and make it to the state track meet in Des Moines this spring.



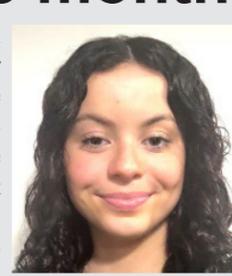
Jones

Peel's Inc. golfer of the month



755 W. Iowa 80 Road
Walcott, IA 52773
(563) 468-5460

Junior Kila Wink has been golfing for three years. Her personal best is a 52 for nine holes. Her goals for this upcoming season are to achieve a new personal best, make it to the state meet as a team, and bond with her new teammates.



Wink

Arty's Ice Cream and Grill's boys' track athlete of the month



609 W. 5th St.
Wilton, IA 52778
563-732-2222

Senior Conner Schwarz has been running track for five years. Schwarz runs the 200-meter dash, the 4x100-meter relay, and the 4x200-meter relay. He qualified for state in the 200-meter dash and the shuttle hurdle relay last season. His goals are to make it to Drake Relays and the state track meet.



Schwarz

Apex Ink and Apparel's junior high athlete of the month



708 5th St., Durant, IA 52747
563-785-6223

Eighth grader Alijah Honts is entering his second year of junior high track. He competes in the 100-meter dash and also the long jump. His longest jump in the event is 14 feet. His favorite part of track is socializing and making new friends during the meets.



Honts