

Girls team places fourth in state competition

Heather Hammond wins three state championships at State Track and Field meet

Rockcastle County High School sophomore Heather Hammond electrified a captive audience and literally dominated three of her four events in the 2003 KTCCHA Class 2A State Track & Field Championships held at the University of Kentucky this past Friday and Saturday.

Heather, already a two-time state champion including titles in the 400-meter dash and 1600-meter relay as an eighth grader, added three more state titles to her growing collection giving her five state championship titles to date.

In doing so, Heather led the RCHS girls' team to an awesome fourth place finish, scoring 32 of the girls' 41 total points. The girls missed a state runner-up finish by only 10 points, despite having only three girls

score in state competition. This marked the second year in a row that the girls had placed at least fourth at state. Two years ago, they finished as state runner-up.

Competition began early Friday morning with preliminary rounds of most events and finals of the 3200-meter relay and long jump. The hopes of the RCHS girls' track team rested squarely on the shoulders of six young ladies. Their goal: a top five finish at the state championships. They also knew that with perfect competition came a chance for a state runner-up finish.

The RCHS girls' 3200-meter relay team consisted of freshmen all-state cross-country runners Kayla Hayes and Jessi Asher, along with freshmen Danielle Arnold, and eighth

grader Morgan Kincer.

The girls hoped to get in the scoring column with an eighth place finish or better in the state championships. Kayla got the team off to a great start, blazing her way to her best 800-meter time ever (2:34). Morgan kept up the torrid pace during her second leg of the race. Danielle ran a brilliant third leg to keep RCHS close. Jessi ran a very fast final leg and the team finished 10th overall with an awesome time of 10:43.59, their second fastest of the season. Even better is the fact that this four-some will have three more years to compete together and many opportunities for a state championship in this event.

Heather began her pursuit of history with the 400-meter dash preliminaries. It is uncertain whether any athlete in Kentucky has ever won the 400-meter dash and 300-meter hurdles back-to-back. It is a certainty that it's not been attempted with any luck in the past ten years of the state meet. Some athletes may be capable of winning both in a regular season competition, or even at region, but select few have ever tried both at the state level and had any success, let alone win them both. None in recent KTCCHA history have been able to overcome the grueling 400-meter dash, and then win the 300-meter hurdles with almost no rest or recovery time.

Last season, Heather made a valiant attempt at this nearly impossible feat.

She competed well in both events at state last season and finished as state runner-up, despite opinions from other coaches and officials throughout the state that it was a waste of time doing both and that winning them back-to-back couldn't be done.

This season, Heather viewed that scenario as her main focus and challenge. She made it her goal from day one. The 400-meter dash went exactly as Heather had planned. She cruised to an easy victory in her heat securing a top spot in Saturday's finals with an excellent time of 1:01.18. Almost immediately came the 300-meter hurdles.

Once again, Heather claimed the top spot in her heat and overall with an easy victory in a spectacular 47.5

seconds.

The last event on Friday for the girls was one of their best - long jump. Heather and sophomore teammate Chere' Emba sought to put RCHS on the scoreboard. The girls had placed in the top two spots in regional competition.

During the long jump competition, each competitor received three jumps in the preliminary round, with the top nine competitors qualifying for the finals and another three attempts. Chere' jumped exceptionally well in the first heat of competition and easily qualified for the finals. Heather led off her series of jumps with an awesome effort of 16'10", her best mark of the season. She qualified for the finals in the number one position.

When the finals began, Chere' continued to get better, leaping a season's best 15'4.5" and placing an amazing eighth in the state in the event. Heather dominated the event with perhaps one of the best series of jumps in Class 2A long jump history. She recorded two jumps of 16'10", two jumps of 17'1", and her eventual best of 17'2". Heather easily won the state championship in this event by nearly 8" over her nearest competitor.

Her second jump would have won the state title by 4". Both Heather and Chere' scored a combined 11 points for RCHS, ranking them fourth among all teams after the first day of competition.

Saturday's finals proved to be just as exciting for RCHS. Freshman Kayla Hayes, regional champion in both the 1600 and 3200-meter runs, sought her first-ever state title in the events. In the 1600-meter run, Kayla ran an unbelievable race. She got off to a very fast start and kept up a consistent pace throughout her race. Kayla sprinted the last one hundred meters with everything she had left. She finished in an impressive seventh place overall in 5:40.23, the best finish ever at state for an RCHS 1600-meter competitor.

Kayla carried her success over to the 3200-meter run. Despite the tough field of competitors, Kayla led the first lap and held her position in the top five for the majority of the race. She finished in eighth place overall with an awesome time of 12:25.44. This marked the best time ever for an RCHS competitor in state championship competition. Kayla earned three points for her spectacular effort in both races.

Not to be outdone, junior Andrew Nelson, the lone competitor for the RCHS boys' team, had an excellent 3200-meter race. Andrew finished as regional runner-up in the event and sought his first 3200-meter state title.

Andrew got off to a great start, despite a very fast field of competitors.

He ran an even, consistent race throughout and finished the grueling two-miles with an awesome 12th place finish overall. In the process, he established a new RCHS record in the event with a time of 10:29.04, breaking the previous mark he set earlier this season.

Chere' participated in her best event, triple jump, early Saturday morning. She sought her first-ever state championship in the event after defeating last year's state champion in this year's regional championships.

Despite the unbelievably windy conditions, Chere' competed exceptionally well. She leaped an impressive 33'9.5", missing the state title by only 10.5". Her effort of 33'9.5" was the best ever for an RCHS competitor in this year's state championship competition.

She placed an impressive fourth place overall and earned a valuable five points for RCHS. Chere' will have a great chance to earn all-state honors in triple jump for her spectacular season, as well as her effort in the state championships.

Heather began Saturday with the high jump competition. Heather came into the meet as the second ranked jumper in Class 2A during the regular season with a leap of 5'4". In order to prepare for her historic attempt at the 400 and 300 hurdles, Heather was forced to rush through the high jump competition, since it is in direct conflict with her other two events.

Still, Heather managed an impressive seventh place finish with a leap of 4'10".

Coincidentally, 5'4" won this year's state title, matching Heather's best effort of the season.

With high jump out of the way, Heather became focused on her season long goal - back-to-back state titles in the 400-meter dash and 300-meter hurdles. The 400 featured her rival for the past three years from Paducah Tilghman, senior sensation Tami Akojie. Akojie won state titles in the 100-meter and 200-meter dashes during this year's competition

and also won the 400 as a runner for St. Mary's before transferring to Paducah. Heather had defeated Akojie the past two years at state, but Akojie entered the competition much improved and the number one ranked runner in the 400-meter dash in Class 2A.

Heather got off to a great start in the race and set the pace with a blistering first one hundred meters. She led through the first three-fourths of the race when Akojie finally pulled even. The girls battled the entire last 100 meters, with the state title on the line. At the wire, Heather edged Akojie in a near photo finish for her second state championship title in the event. Heather's awesome time of 1:04.64 seconds shattered her own RCHS record in the event in state competition.

With half of her goal realized with the 400-meter dash state championship, the 300-meter hurdle race and a chance to possibly make history was only precious moments away. Heather spent those few minutes desperately trying to catch her breath, get a drink, and mentally prepare for the exhausting task that lie ahead.

Shortly thereafter, before Heather had time to even gather her thoughts,

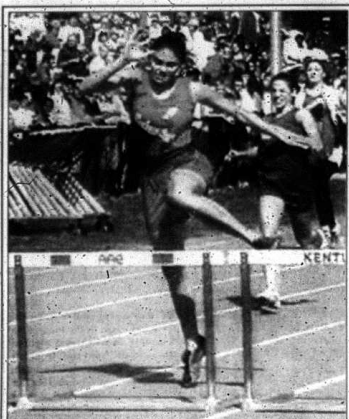
the 300-meter hurdle race got underway. Heather once again took a commanding lead and stretched it out through the first one hundred fifty meters. Motivated from her win in

the 400, she ran one of her best hurdle races of the year, despite her apparent exhaustion. Heather was never seriously challenged in the race until the very end as she started to ease back near the finish. Nevertheless, her challenger's last second effort was not nearly enough as Heather came away with the 300-meter hurdle state championship title in 48.03 seconds.

Heather had realized her goal, winning both the 400-meter dash and the 300-meter hurdles back-to-back. Certainly a historic moment and a feat that no one seemed to be able to recall having been accomplished before.

Along with her three state championships in the 400, 300 hurdles, and long jump, as well as her finish in long jump, Heather earned an RCHS record 32 points for her team at state. Amazingly, her 32 points would have ranked her eighth among the top ten teams in the Class 2A State Championships by herself. Heather will automatically be selected first team all-state in all three events that she won, including the 400, 300 hurdles, and long jump.

A great end to another impressive season for both the RCHS girls' and boys' track and field teams. The RCHS track and field teams will compete in the first-ever middle school state championships to be held at Eastern Kentucky University on June 14.



Sophomore Heather Hammond goes over a hurdle at the state championships. Heather won the 300-meter hurdles state title immediately after winning the 400-meter dash championship giving her three state championship titles for the meet and an RCHS record of 32 points in state competition. Heather has now won five state championship titles in her career and will automatically be named first team all-state in the 400-meter dash, 300-meter hurdles and long jump.



The RCHS girls' track team finished as regional runner-up and fourth in the state championship. Team members include, front row from left: Kayla Hayes, Heather Hammond, Morgan Kincer and Danielle Arnold. Second row from left: Morgan Thacker, Courtney Bullock, Ashley Bullock, Anna Guilfoil, Sarah Parsons, Chere' Emba and Elizabeth Bussell.



The RCHS boys' team had a great regional competition and Andrew Nelson qualified for state in the 3200-meter run. Team members include, front row from left: Brandon Cole and Derrick Baker. Back row from left: Florian Trummer, Gabe Guilfoil and Andrew Nelson. Not shown is Jackson Bray.



Seventh grader Courtney Bullock goes after a Lexington Catholic competitor in the 1600-meter relay in regional competition.



Junior Andrew Nelson finished as regional runner-up in the 3200-meter run and placed 12th in the state championships with a new RCHS record time of 10:29.



Seventh grader Morgan Thacker runs the final leg of the girls' 800-meter relay at region.



Eighth grader Morgan Kincer ran the second leg of the girls' 800-meter relay in regional competition.

NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER • NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER • NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER

EXPECT MORE! Since 1976

NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER

US 25 North, Berea, KY
(609) 906-0808

CARFAX CERTIFIED DEALER

SEE OUR ENTIRE INVENTORY AT WWW.NEARENAUTO.COM

\$69 DOWN BUYS*

'88 & '99 Expedition
Edde Bauer, 4x4, exp, has it all
Starting at **\$16,990**

'98 Lincoln T-Cal
11,990

'02 XLT Suzuki
14,990

'98 Dodge Ram
12,990

'97 Chev. 1500 X-Cab
13,990

2000 Sunfire
7,990

1999 Camaro
9,990

2001 Impala
9,990

2000 Cavalier
7,990

2000 Gr. Prix
8,990

1998 Malibu
6,990

2000 Saturn
6,990

2001 Intrepid
8,990

2000 Neon
7,490

1999 Silverado
9,990

Central KY's Best Selection

OVER 100

Cars, Trucks, Vans & SUVs

FREE WARRANTY

'01 Wheelstar
12,990

'00 S-10 LS
7,990

'00 Chev. Lumina
7,990

'02 Olds Alero
10,990

'99 Infiniti QX4
16,990

'02 Dodge Ram SLT
18,990

'01 Chev. 1500 LS
17,990

'00 Ranger X-Cab
12,990

'00 Grand Lavado Jeep
15,990

Just Remember "Price Sells"

Good Cars. Happy Customers. - We Have Both

OUR REPUTATION IS YOUR GUARANTEE!

NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER • NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER • NEAR NEW AUTO CENTER