

Few get Smart

State competition motivates Plymouth track star

By Phil Naumoff
Shelby Journal correspondent

PLYMOUTH — Plymouth's Todd Smart didn't need a whole lot of motivation coming into the 1991 season. All he had to do was relive the final week of the 1990 season.

Smart, a junior, finished second at last year's state meet in the 110 high hurdles, which he considered his weaker event at the time. He had failed to qualify for the state in the 300 meter hurdles, his specialty, when he fell during the regional meet.

So wanting to improve on both, Smart really hasn't needed any other motivational factors to carry him through this past season.

"I guess (improving in each event) is what I've been looking for," Smart said, one day after qualifying for the state in both races at Saturday's Bowling Green Division III regionals. "I guess in the highs I was hoping to have some faster times, but in the 300 I'm pretty satisfied — it's my best time."

Smart qualified for this weekend's state meet at Ohio Stadium by finishing first in the 110 with a time of 14.8 while placing third in the 300 with a 39.6.

Smart had the 300 race won going into the last curve but took a hurdle off the wrong leg, which threw him off stride. He then had to stave off a late challenge from several other runners

The race was so close, in fact, that judges couldn't decide the first through fifth place. Then after more than an hour and a half of studying the finish line picture, they gave Smart a third-place finish and a spot in Columbus.

"I guess I was a little tired and need a little more conditioning," said Smart, reliving the race and near miss at a chance to redeem himself from last year.

Smart's coach, Marty McKenzie, feels that his star's best race is the 300 despite his recent bad luck in the event.

"He'll run the 400 hurdles because he's not really a sprinter," he said. "Todd has such good form — and I've told him this — that in the 110 the guy that finished second just behind him beat him between each hurdle and that Todd won because of the way he got over the hurdles — his form."

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Smart has rarely been tested this year, as he has set both a school and Firelands Conference record in both the 110 and 300, running a 14.3 and 39.1, respectively.

Smart also gained some much needed experience at the Mehock Relays this past spring. Although he failed to qualify for the finals, he posted the seventh fastest time in the 100. Only the top two from each heat advanced, and Smart was unlucky enough to be matched up against the top two hurdlers in the meet. It was the only time, until Saturday, that Smart had been beaten in either race.

"It would be better if I could run against that type of competition all the time," he said. "It's the only time I got beat all year, and I guess I shouldn't have comfort zone and be too confident."



Todd Smart of Plymouth High School gets ready to jump a hurdle during last year's state meet.

Smart's Mehock exposure was a plus, agreed McKenzie.

"Competition like that always makes a kid push harder and get better results," he said.

Smart and McKenzie are hoping for similar results this weekend, when scouts from several colleges will be in attendance. Smart has been

scouted by several schools but is leaning toward Ohio State because it offers a degree in his desired field of study, ceramic engineering.

Some good performances on Ohio State's track facility this weekend may allow Smart a chance to run there several more times beyond his senior year.

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