

A 4 x 4 Victory. Finns throughout his career.

Sidelines

By Jim DeLand

Battle Creek Central coach Jack Finn paced the stands at Perry Field in Ann Arbor Saturday and watched his carefully constructed track powerhouse fall apart like a house of cards. The superb hurdler, Andy Johnson, tumbled into a sandlot in the low hurdle semifinal, hopping home dead last and failing to even qualify for the final. His half-miler, Dave Talbot, ran 1:57 flat and failed to place.

The 800-yard relay super team that had posted a phenomenal 1:27.3 while winning the regionals was beaten by Flint Northern. His towering sophomore sensation Steve Nelson, who had broken Dallas Long's national 12-year-old record in the shot put with a heave of over 59 feet, finished a feeble fourth behind a winning toss of 56.1.

Johnson completed his personal day of agony by stumbling with the sixth barrier in the high hurdles after leading the final 150 all the way and staggering in fourth.

The final straw fell in the mile relay when his runners committed the irreparable sin. They dropped the baton.

So Jack Finn paced the stands, and maybe he was lucky he didn't all dove.

"What's the world record for splitters," asked Mrs. John MacKenzie, wife of Bedford Township's track coach. "I think I've just broken it."

It wasn't the only record broken—there was also the record for confusion. The 800-yard relay results were announced in so many different orders it began to sound like three different events. Most folks went home not knowing which team had won the meet.

"There must be a better way to run a track meet," one frustrated coach muttered as he waited for the final results 12 minutes after the meet had ended.

"I think we ran a better meet at Battle Creek," said basketball coach Chuck Turner.

"What a terrific day for a good bunch of kids," said Jack Finn. . . but nobody was feeling sorry for him. His team had just won Michigan's Class A track championship for the second straight year.

If there was anyone to feel sorry for it was Flint Northern coach Herb Bator, whose swift half-mile relay team got lost in the confounding maze on the University of Michigan's rubberized track and lost a state record . . . and a state championship.

There was no doubt about what happened. Flint Northern's third man ran his entire leg inside a yellow line that marked the innermost lane of the track. Everyone saw it. Two hours later Northern was disqualified, wiping out a record clocking of 1:28.5 and 18 points, while moving Battle Creek from second to first.

Flint Northern lost the state championship by nine and one-half points.

It was a day of disappointment all around.

A mammoth Flint Central delegation turned out to see Herb Washington charter the state sprint records in a dual with Flint Northern's William Wallace. Swift winds proved to be a more formidable obstacle as Washington had to settle for a one-eighth share in the 45-year-old record of 8.8 seconds in the 100-yard dash.

Wallace didn't even get runner-up honors, being beaten out both times by Battle Creek's Eugene Brown.

"He was the only one of our kids who ran like he could," Finn said of Brown. "He proved he was a sprinter. He told me at the Mendell Relay Wallace wouldn't beat him again, and he proved it today."

Southeastern Michigan's two representatives found themselves overmatched.

St. Joe Sprinter Al Litterer was assigned to the same preliminary heat as Washington in the 200 and placed fifth in 23.4. Ray Lewis of Hills ran in the slow heat of the half mile and failed to crack two minutes.

"Just imagine" one coach mused, "what would have happened if Battle Creek had run its form. It would have been a shambles. There aren't many teams that can win the state championship on an off day."

The thought was frightening. If the Bearcats had just matched their best performance of the season in every event, they would have picked up 28 more points and would have won by 27½ even without the disqualification.

But Battle Creek never did finish first and Finn even lost a leg of the run for the 5th-place medal in the high jump. His Phil Todd had cleared 6.3 to pick up 2½ unexpected points.

It was that kind of day for Finn and his Bearcats.

They didn't really win anything. . . except the state track championship.



JACK FINN

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