

EMU coed joins track elite despite serious back injury

YPSILANTI (UPI) — An 18-year-old Eastern Michigan University freshman who at one time wasn't sure she would ever compete in athletics is now representing the U.S. in international women's track competition.

"I guess I have been very fortunate," said Sue McLalin, who has overcome scoliosis, a lateral curvature of the spine, and hopes to make the U.S. Olympic team in 1976.

"When they first discovered my back problem, no one knew what might happen," she said. "It could have turned out quite differently."

The former Redford Union High School honors student already has competed against the Soviet Union track team in Richmond, Va., helping the U. S. team gain a 5.5 tie with an 18-foot-9½ inch leap for fourth place.

Miss McLalin had to wear a six-pound back brace for three years after a physician identified the problem as scoliosis during a physical examination in 1967. She wore the waist-to-chin

leather and metal brace 24 hours a day for the first year.

"I guess I used sports to compensate for a restricted social life," she said. "Girls at that age want to feel pretty and wear stylish clothes. That is hard to do with a back brace."

Her activities included basketball, volleyball, tennis, softball and swimming as well as track. She joined the Wolverine Track Club and set an AAU state record for 13-year-old girls in the shot put with a 34-foot-1 effort while wearing the brace, and in 1971 captured the state title in the long jump for 16-year-old girls with a 17-foot-5 jump.

"I was just trying to keep up with my older brothers," she said. "They were involved in track and got me interested in it. My first pair of track shoes were hand-me-downs from my brother."

Miss McLalin, a physical education major at EMU, said she owes a lot to track, and labels the Russian meet "my biggest thrill."

"I just could not believe I made the team" she said. "It was like a dream."

Susan McLalin EMU Coed Record Eagle Traverse City Friday April 6, 1972

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