

Roland's final lean gives him state title

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BATTLE CREEK — When Wilbert Roland of Port Huron Central lined up in the starting blocks for the 100-yard dash Saturday, he figured he had one runner standing between him and the state Class B championship.

Marysville's Glen Willard finished fifth in the preliminary heat of the 100 and did not qualify for the semi-finals. That left Vern Chontos of Lake Fenton who Roland thought would give him the stiffest competition in the final race at the boy's Class B track finals at Harper Creek High School, south of Battle Creek.

Roland got a good start out of the blocks and beat Chontos to win the 100 in 10.1. Chontos' official time also was 10.1 but Roland took the top honor by leaning through the finishing string first. Later, Roland added a second in the 220, finishing four-tenths of a second behind Chontos.

Roland's finishes were the best of the boys Class B athletes from the Blue Water Area. PHC finished ninth in the state with 15 points.

Two records were broken at the meet. Derick Futrell of Saginaw Buena Vista set a record in the high jump, clearing 6 feet, 11 1/4 inches. The old record was 6-9, set by Gordon Jackson of Flint Bentley last year. Jackson finished fourth, clearing just 6-3.

Another record was set in the 880 run. Mark Poelman of Wyoming Rogers finished in 1:52.9, surpassing the old mark of 1:53.6 set by Mike Helms of Fenton in 1975.

Anchor Bay had several athletes qualify for the finals but only miler Neal Toward placed. He was seventh with a time of 4:25, seven-tenths of a second better than his fastest time this season. Wyoming Rogers' Poelman was first in 4:19.5.

Mark Sari of Marysville was fifth in the shot put with a heave of 52-9/16, his best of the year. Lee Wolverton of Linden won with 55-11/16.

Tom Brown of Imlay City was the only

other area athlete to place in the finals. He finished eighth in the 330 low hurdles with a time of 40.1. The winning time of Wyoming Rogers' Mike Erickson was 38.0.

In winning the biggest race he's ever run, Roland said got a good start, but not a terrific one, and didn't run a particularly good race.

"I got a good start but it wasn't one of my better races," said the junior dashman whose best time this year was 9.8. He said one reason for the slower time was a slow track.

"The track is hot and the tar sticks to your shoes," he said.

Roland barely got into the finals after finishing second in his preliminary race. In the semifinals, from which the top four runners advanced to the finals, Roland finished fourth, just edging out the fifth place runner.

This was Roland's third trip to the state finals. He went as a freshman and a sophomore on the 440 and 880 relay teams. He anchored the Cougars' 880 relay Saturday and worked from fourth place to third on the final leg. PHC's time was 1:33.3, equal to its best this season, but not good enough to place in the finals.

Marysville also entered a 440 relay team, and although the Vikings moved from third to first on the final leg to win their heat in 1:34.2, they did not place.

Roland said he estimated before the 100 that the most competition would come from Willard, who has run the dash in 9.9, and Chontos. Willard beat Roland last Wednesday at The Times Herald Meet of Champions.

When Willard finished fifth in the preliminary race and was eliminated, Roland said. "Then I thought I had a better chance. I've raced against a couple of them (finalists) before. The guy from Fenton (Chontos) beat me at the Central Michigan (University) Relays."

Roland turned the tables Saturday, leading from the blocks to the finish.

If the 220 had been 15 yards longer, Roland may have been able to win a second

championship. Roland started slow and trailed the field for the first half of the race. Around the final two turns he moved through the pack to challenge Chontos near the finish and seemed to have more left than Chontos.

Brown's eighth in the low hurdles was a bit disappointing to Imlay City coach Doug Perkins, but he said he was happy with the race, nonetheless.

"I thought he would do better," Perkins said. "But it was a good race. He injured his ankle a couple of weeks ago and he's still not fully recovered. He ran a good race, though."

Perkins said, too, that Brown's placement in a slow heat may have had a bearing on his finish. In a heat with faster runners, Brown may have pushed harder and turned in a faster time.

The same thing appeared to happen to the Tars' Toward, even though his mile time was his fastest. Toward was in the slower of the two mile heats and got out to an early lead that he held to the finish. Toward pulled away from his closest competitor on the final lap and won by slightly more than five yards.

There were several other area runners who were either eliminated in the preliminaries or made it to the finals but didn't place. Mark Blair of Marine City ran the 440 in 51.4 and Winslow Chapman of Central finished the 440 in 52.2 but didn't place. Keith Spranger of Anchor Bay ran the 880 in 2:41.9 and didn't place. Anchor Bay's Matt Silva finished the mile in 4:30 and PHC's Steve Swarts ran the two-mile in 9:50.7, neither placing.

Mike Turnbull of Marysville missed placing in the 330 low hurdles as did Reggie Butler of Anchor Bay in the long jump. The Tars also had two other athletes. Don Robinson in the high jump, who went out at 6-3, and Scott Gostovich whose best throw in the discus was 133.

Marine City's mile relay team finished in 3:33.4 and Anchor Bay's time in the same race was 3:32.2. Neither placed. Anchor Bay finished the 440 relay in 45.4 and Marysville's time was 45.6 but neither were good enough to break into the top eight.



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