



Mackenzie High's Delisa Walton wants one thing: a chance to run in the Olympics

Free Press Photo by HUGH GRANNUM

# National marks fall for Delisa

By MICK McCABE  
Free Press Sports Writer

In a few years, Dec. 20, 1977, may have become a very important date in the life of Delisa Walton.

That was the day she quit. "We were in Vermont," said Richard Ford, coach of the Motor City Track Club, for which Walton competes. "Delisa was supposed to run in the 880 but she hadn't trained for it. Well, she lost the race and she came up to me with tears in her eyes and said, 'I quit. I quit letting people beat me.' "

Walton has lived up to that decision: Since that day she hasn't lost a race. Last Saturday, she captured the state high school Class A championships in both the 880- and 440-yard runs, setting state records in both.

Her time of 2:07.7 in the 880 established a new national record for high school girls, and this Saturday she will be one of the competitors in the first annual Detroit Free Press Girls' Invitational track and field meet at Warren Fitzgerald High School.

Belying the incredible times she has posted, Delisa is just a junior and will be around Detroit Mackenzie High School for another year.

"I began running when my junior high gym teacher saw me beating all the boys in races and contacted Mr. Ford and asked him to coach me," Walton recalled.

Ford recalled his first glimpses of Walton in action as a 13-year-old.

"After the first time I saw her run, I called all the girls together," he said, "and I told them 'this (Delisa) is a superstar.' Some of the girls laughed, but that very day, with no training, Delisa ran one girl right into the ground. She is fantastic, her endurance is tremendous. Who else could run two miles

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## Delisa Walton

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Thu, Aug 16, 2018

**DELISA SETS NEW MARKS**

**'Delisa is just a beautiful girl . . . she's perfect'**

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without training? Within three weeks they were calling her superstar."

The high school track season is over (except for the Free Press meet), but for Delisa, the nitty-gritty is just beginning. Qualifying for the Junior Nationals and the Junior Olympics are ahead, and the Junior Nationals are extremely important to Walton because a victory there would mean a trip to Russia this summer. That partly explains her record time last weekend.

"I want to go to Russia. I've been to a lot of places in this country and Canada but never to Russia," she said. "Mr. Ford talked to me before I ran and told me we've been working hard for this day and told me to run like it was the Nationals.

"I had run a 2:11 but that was against the wind so I figured I could run 2:08. I kind of shocked myself with the 2:07. I was shocked because usually my legs are hurting at the end of a race but they weren't Saturday. My coach said if I had my mind together I could do it."

The 16-year-old's mind is certainly together. Ford and Jan Chapman, the girls' track coach at Mackenzie, can find no flaws in this youngster's character. She's bursting with charm and personality to go along with her terrific smile.

She's perfect," Ford said proudly. "She's never any problem . . . she's a joy to be around. She never gets moody and all the other girls on the team love her to death."

Chapman, who gives all the credit for Walton's development to Ford, says Walton is an inspiration to the younger kids at Mackenzie.

"Her personality is just as good as her athletic ability, and that's what makes her so good," said Chapman. "If we had 20 more kids with her heart and willingness to work we'd be super. Delisa is just a beautiful girl."

The 5-foot-7, 125-pound ("I really do weigh that much," she insists) Walton is busy with track all year long, which cuts down on her social life.

"I'm not interested in guys right now because they all want me to quit track," she said. "But I can't because I can get a scholarship and do what I always wanted to do through track."

**ONE OF THE THINGS** Delisa wants is to make a couple of trips to the Olympics.

"I want to run in the Olympics in 1980 and win them in 1984," she said firmly. "I know there are a lot of women in different parts of the world who are much stronger than me. I took me three years to develop this strength and in three more years I should be able to win."

Ford says Delisa's goals are attainable.

"They're quite possible," he said. "I think she's realistic. There are women running some very fast times, and she realizes it will take her a while to get there."

Walton says her winning habit is a result of her "getting mean."

"LAST YEAR I WASN'T mean enough," she said. "My head wasn't together then. Now I psych myself up and I just think about winning. Last year I was worrying about the next girl. But if I'm tired they have to be just as tired."

Ford says she needs to keep improving.

"The national record didn't mean that much," he admitted. "She ran that without any help from anybody in the field. If she's going to Russia she's going to have to run 1:59; she's easing down there slowly.

"People say if she keeps her head straight she'll be okay, but she's never been a problem. She gets excited at the smallest meets and claps for herself when she does well . . . she's cute. She hasn't lost her enthusiasm yet, and I don't think she ever will."



Jan Chapman

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