

Middle distance flash Delisa Walton is a model athlete

By MICK McCABE
Free Press Sports Writer

It was 10 years ago this month that the seed of determination was planted in Delisa Walton.

Walton, who is now the premier female middle distance runner in the state, was seven years old at the time she ran into the street and was hit by a car. She was rushed to the hospital with a broken right hip.

"My hip was as big as my thigh," Walton recalled. "They had to stretch it and put it in a slot — talk about pain. They put me in a cast from my toes to my chest. I was in it for two months. I couldn't even sit up. Then when I got out of that my appendix burst."

But according to Delisa, the worst was yet to come. When fall rolled around she was on crutches and was sent to a school for crippled children.

"I cried everyday I went to that school," Walton said. "I couldn't believe I went to that school. I felt like a cripple."

According to Dr. Edward Loniewski, Delisa could have been crippled for life.

"At first the doctor said I might need a pin in my leg," she said. "Then he said I would walk with a limp forever. I told the doctor there was no way I was going back to that school. He said I could go to regular school on a trial basis.



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Determined to become a world-class middle distance runner, 17-year-old Delisa Walton of Mackenzie High

School overcame a near-tragic childhood accident and has set her sights on the 1984 Olympic Games.

Walton feature 1

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SHE'S A MODEL OF CONSISTENCY

Delisa Walton is bound for glory

WALTON, from Page 1D

"I broke my crutches on a sewer and I tried walking without them. I guess I was hard-headed. The doctor said, 'You're a very determined young lady.' I was determined then and that's how I am now — determined to win."

WALTON HAS BEEN A big winner these last two years, winning Class A state championships in the 440-yard dash and the 880-yard run for Detroit Mackenzie.

She will close out her prep career Saturday at the second annual Free Press Girls Invitational Track Meet at Warren Fitzgerald High.

Next year she will be running for the University of Tennessee, which finished third in the AIAW national championships this spring.

A year ago Walton set a national high school record for the 880 in the Class A finals, but she was a disappointing fourth in the Junior Nationals in Bloomington, Ind.

"Last year when I came up against good competition I just froze," she said. "By being nervous and scared I got so tired. Running against women is a lot different than running against high school girls. I have to plan my race because there's a lot of pushing and shoving."

The highlight of her young career came this past winter at the AAU national championships in Madison Square Garden. Walton finished sixth against the best women in the country.

"It was hard even qualifying for the finals," she said. "I had to run just as hard in the heats as I did in the finals. Even if I finished last I knew I was the eighth best in the country. I was petrified, but I didn't want to be left too far behind."

WALTON RUNS WITH THE grace of a gazelle, combining both speed and endurance. But she also has All-America looks and an All-World smile. She is much more mature than most 17-year olds but she has a little-girl innocence about her that is paying off already.



Free Press Photo by IRA ROSENBERG

Delisa Walton: 'I guess I was hard-headed.'

The April issue of Seventeen Magazine contained four pages of Delisa that could bring her a future as a model.

"I hated it," she said of her experience posing for photographers. "At the Junior Olympics last summer they took pictures of all the girls. They got it down to five girls and they asked me to send some pictures in regular clothes. They called in late December and asked me to come to New York for three days.

"On Jan. 3 they cut my hair. I cried for weeks.

They said they were going to cut this much off," she said holding her fingers a half-inch apart. "They gave me a magazine to read to keep my busy and when I looked up I was bald-headed. It was so short they had to use a black pencil to color in some areas.

"I was ready to pack up and come home. But they took me out to dinner at an expensive restaurant and I kind of forgot about it."

One picture has Walton outdoors crouched in a starting position. The temperature was well below freezing.

"If you look at the picture I have chill bumps all over," she pointed out. "It was real nasty bad cold. They'd take three pictures and then go in the van to warm up and then take three more pictures.

"They were doing everything, putting on my clothes, taking off my clothes, putting makeup on me. I had so much makeup on I could have made up three people. The first thing my mother said when she saw the magazine was: 'Look at all that lipstick on your face.' But I thought it was real nice."

WALTON'S LOOKS AND BUBBLY personality will come in handy when she majors in communications at Tennessee. She says she would like to get into sports broadcasting and she could be a star at that, too.

In the last four years, Walton has spent most of her time running for the Motor City Track Club and Richard Ford, who has turned out many outstanding female track stars.

A year ago, Walton said she wanted to run in the 1980 Olympics and win in the 1984 Olympics.

"Seriously, being honest, I don't think I can make it in '80 unless I do something fabulous all of a sudden," she said. "Mr. Ford says I can make it but I don't know. What I want to do is run in the World Games in two years and then in the Pan American Games. If you get in one of those you're bound to do something in the ('84) Olympic Trials.

"I always wanted to be in the Olympics. I used to do my little therapy exercises and read Wilma Rudolph books. She was a cripple and she overcame it. I knew I could do the same thing."

Walton feature 2

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