

The Preps

Heat feet

Michigan-bound Wilcher ready to hurdle anything

By Jim Spadafore
News Staff Writer

His letter from Bo Schembechler is tucked away safely at home but Thomas Wilcher hopes he doesn't have to use it.

Wilcher is an exceptionally gifted athlete. There are goals to be a pro football player and a hurdler in the 1984 Olympics.

"I know right where that letter is just in case I have to flash it back to him (Bo)," the Detroit Central High senior said, leaning against a hurdle while catching his breath after a workout.

"Bo wrote that I get an opportunity to run track after football is over. He won't go back on his word."

Wilcher could be one of the most versatile athletes to ever perform for the Wolverines. He can make an impact like a Rick Leach or a Butch Woolfolk.

The well-built, 6-foot, 185-pound Wilcher is a speed-burner and people come out to watch his muscular legs churn.

"Hey, what's your best time in the 40?" asked one bystander as Wilcher walked near the fence after a sprint.

"4.27 seconds," Wilcher replied.

"That's moving," the bystander said.

On Wilcher's varsity jacket are inscribed the words "Heat Feet."

"That's the nickname the Motor City Track Club gave me," Wilcher said. "I like it."

Coach Schembechler is probably dreaming of the day Heat Feet totes the football for the Michigan Wolverines, sliding through a hole and then streaking for daylight.

ness like an O.J. Simpson-type runner."

There is the possibility that Wilcher will play defensive back for Michigan but he doesn't mind.

"His future as a pro football player probably will be as a defensive player . . . he really likes to hit," Thomas said.

"But I think Bo wants to win a national title and Thomas will make a great tailback."

Wilcher, a Detroit News All-Stater in football and track, rushed for over 1,200 yards and scored 10 touchdowns last season. Once he turned the corner there was no one who could catch him.

His accomplishments in track are just as impressive. He shatters a record almost every time he laces on his spikes. He holds the national high school record of 13.60 in the 110-meter high hurdles. This season, as defending state Class A hurdle champion, he has set meet relay records of 7.2 in the 60 highs at Huron; 7.1 in the highs and 6.7 in the 60 lows at the Spartan Relays; 13.7 in the 110 meters at Toledo and 13.6 in the 110 and the nation's fastest high school time of 36.4 in the 300 intermediate at Dayton, Ohio.

Although Bo usually protests a football player competing in another sport, he had to make an exception for Wilcher. That was the only way he could recruit him away from Southern California, Michigan State or Tennessee. Recruiters phoned his home so much it became a nuisance.

"It was bothering my mother and me . . . deciding on which college was the toughest thing I've ever had to do," Wilcher said.