



MICHAEL S. GREEN / The Detroit News

Osborn junior Jarrett Jackson has purpose in his stride as he chases the state title in the 400 meters.

Making up the ground

Title in sight: Osborn's Jackson runs toward goal with renewed dedication.

By Michael James
 THE DETROIT NEWS

Detroit Northern led the 800 relay race by 25 yards when the baton was thrust into the hands of Osborn's anchorman Jarrett Jackson. But the deficit wasn't too much to make up for the kid from Mobile, Ala. He does it all the time.

"Woo! Get 'em Alabama," teammates shouted as Jackson broke into his familiar stride, his 6-foot-3 frame unfurling muscular legs that carried him effortlessly past his competition from Northern.

Dramatic comebacks have become the norm for Jackson, who transferred to Detroit from Mobile's Vigor High last year as a sophomore. At the end of the day, he also had won the 200-meter dash, the 400 and anchored the winning 800-relay team.

"I told my coach I kind of like being behind," said the junior, whose specialty is the 400 meters. "I feel I run better times when I'm behind because I have something to go after."

What Jackson chases now is a state title in the 400. His time of 49.7 is the fastest in the state this season. He also has the top Class A long jump this season with a leap of 22 feet, 5 inches.

Profiling Jarrett Jackson

- Age: 17
- School, class: Detroit Osborn, junior
- Sport: Track
- Hobbies: Football and track
- Favorite subject: Math
- Favorite food: Pizza
- Favorite book: *Julius Caesar*
- Noteworthy accomplishments: Boasts state's best time in the 400 meters at 49.7 seconds and best long jump at 22-5.

Not bad for someone who wasn't serious about training last year. But a broken collarbone during spring football tryouts kept him out of the last year's state championships — and strengthened his resolve to win a title.

"After I broke my shoulder, people were saying 'Man, I thought you were going to win the state title,' so that kind of motivated me," said Jackson, who also played baseball and football last year. "So, I've tried to condition myself as best I can to win the state."

Jackson's new attitude suits Coach Jack Williams just fine. Now that Williams doesn't have to work overtime to keep his talented athlete focused on the track, he concentrates on ensuring the student with a 2.8 grade-point average excels off the track.

"I'm trying to get him geared to go to college academically as well as athletically," said Williams, who took over Osborn's track program two years ago.

"Last year I couldn't get him to train as well as I thought he should, but this year he wants to train," Williams said. "I don't have to look for him. That comes with maturity."

Jackson had little choice but to mature quickly after running in the shadow of former Pershing standout Darnell Hall, who defeated him every time they met last year.

Hall, whose 47.3 in the 400 at the Syracuse Invationals last year was the fifth-fastest in history by a high school athlete, has run 45 seconds this year at Blinn Junior College in Brenham, Tex.

Jackson says Hall's memory still haunts and motivates him.

"Sometimes, I dream about running against him again," says Jackson, whose career best of 48.8 came in a losing effort to Hall last year.

"When he was in high school I always thought if we were on the same team it wouldn't matter who else we put on the relay, we would still win."

For now, Williams plans giving Jackson an opportunity to win against national competition by taking him to the Junior Olympics at the University of North Carolina this summer.

"It'll be good exposure for him," Williams said. "He'll catch the eye of a lot of coaches."

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