

FAST, FASTER,



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS • MICHAEL CURLETT

Pioneer senior sprinter Vania Nelson is so fast some say she "could run a leg on a boys' sprint relay team."

The pride of Pioneer

■ Pioneer senior Vania Nelson is sprinting toward possible state championships in the 100- and 200-meter dashes.

By PAT SCHUTTE
 NEWS SPECIAL WRITER

Sprints happen quickly. But for Pioneer senior Vania Nelson this year, they seem to end when the starter's pistol fires.

Nelson, last year's state runner-up in the 100-meter dash and third-place finisher in the 200, hopes to bring those two titles back to Pioneer, reclaiming the titles won by Pioneer's Heather Brown last spring.

Brown now runs for Indiana, and Nelson is undefeated this outdoor season. She roared through Friday's Belleville regional, winning the 100 by seven-tenths of a second and the 200 by more than a second. Her personal bests are 11.9 and 24.7.

As soon as Nelson leaves the starting line and quickly extends her lead, you hear people associated with the sport say things like, "That's her" and "Look at her go."

"She could run a leg on a boys' sprint relay team at the state meet," one race official said.

Nelson got her start running against boys — her brothers. Toraino Nelson, who's in the Army, was faster than Vania, pushing her in the early stages of her sprinting career.

"When he gets back I think I'll be able to beat him," Nelson said with a confident grin.

Now the push comes from Pioneer's coach, Bryan Westfield.

Nelson, a Pioneer captain, sees Westfield in two ways. First, as a coach. She and her teammates sometimes want to clobber him after the intense workouts he puts them through.

But he's a friend, too.

Nelson says she can always count on her coach.

"He's the best," she said. "Anything you need — he's there."

That coach/friend concept, Nelson says, has helped her become the state's top-rated sprinter heading into the state meet. There, she will face her top rival, Detroit Cass Tech's Shameakia Dunwoody.

Dunwoody is the only returning sprinter to have beaten Nelson, though Nelson recently defeated her in the 100 and 200 during a dual meet.

A former cheerleader who quit, saying it was "stale," Nelson has a contagious positive attitude and grasps the mental preparation her sport requires.

"I don't sit there and think I'm going to do bad," she says. "I just get in line and good luck to everybody."

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