Inside advantage Winter competition keeps area runners on track for spring season

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By Jeff Steers
Staff Writer

From the time students are in kindergarten, they are taught not to run in the hallways.

Not everyone follows the rules.

A group of athletes from Jackson-area high schools decided to ignore this rule and spent hours practicing for the upcoming track season in hallways, gymnasiums, or wherever there was space.

The reason for running in the halls is indoor track, a non-sanctioned Michigan High School Athletic Association sport.

Local athletes say the time spent running in hallways, up stairs and outside is beneficial.

Jackson and Albion High Schools are two of Jackson-area schools that run successful indoor track clubs.

Practice space is limited.

"Our sprinters and hurdlers run wherever there is a nook or cranny," Jackson Track Club coach Jerry Reis said. "When the freshman basketball team is out of town, we practice in the old gym."

Both Albion and Jackson get 20 to 25 runners each season, most being spring track participants.

How much of an advantage is running indoor track? Three Jackson runners are finding success early this spring because of the winter workouts.

Eric Brown won the long jump at the Spring Arbor indoor meet with a leap of 22 feet. Thatjump was just 214 inches shorter than his winning Capital Area Conference leap last spring.

"Doing indoor track will help quite a bit," Brown said. "I am just about where I want to be going into the season."

Freshman Alicia Hooper finished fourth at the Michigan Interscholastic Track Coaches indoor state meet in the 60-meter dash.

She set the school-record in the 55-meter with a time of 7.1 seconds at the Wolverine Indoor Invitational.

One Jackson runner spent this winter getting back into shape for spring track. Jackson's Corinthia Wilson was a state qualifier in the 100 two years ago and missed last season due to personal reasons.

"We would run in the third floor hallways," Wilson said. "The workouts were hard; up and down the steps. Having three weeks to get shape for the spring season wouldn't have really worker for met. I improved my times with indoor track."

Wilson finished sixth in the 600 at the indoor state meet and sets her goal on qualifying for the state meet in the 400 and 800 this spring.

Albion seniors Mark Neal and Rob Loveless are out for track for the first time this spring. They both used indoor track to get an early start.

Neal became interested in the shot put last spring by watching his friend compete. Neal approached Albion coach Mike Jurasek this winter about trying the event.

Jurasek gave Neal a video on shot put techniques. Neal must be a quick learner, as he qualified for the indoor state meet with a throw of 50-514. A toss of that length would have won the Selby Memorial Classic last spring by almost two feet.

"Mark is one of the few who can spin and glide in the shot put," Jurasek said. "He is also very strong, bench pressing over 400 pounds."

Loveless planned to run track at Albion until three knee operations prevented the 6-foot-5 senior from competing in spring sports.

Not only did Loveless improve his mile time, he lost 40 pounds, according to Jurasek.

Loveless ran a mile in 4 minutes, 40 seconds indoors.

He was on the winning distance medley relay and 3,200 relay teams at the Huron Indoor Relays at Eastern Michigan University. Albion won both meets.

While the sprinter and middle distance runners ran inside, Grass Lake distance runner Nathan Usher trained outdoors.

Usher competed for Speed Connection, an indoor team made up of Grass Lake and Chelsea runners.

"I think running in the winter is a bigger advantage for distance guys than sprint guys," Usher said.

"The best I did was an eighth-place finish, but that was competing against the best milers in Michigan. There might be 100 guys competing in the mile."

Usher hopes his winter training will help set school records in the 1,600 and 3,200 this spring.

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