

Way to run, son! Flushing record stays in family

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AT FIRST, when Mike Whitmire was younger, it was kind of neat. He could walk into the Flushing gym, look up on the wall where the school's track records were listed, and see his dad's name.

Gary Whitmire, Mike's father, set the school 220-yard dash record of 22.6 seconds in 1968, his senior year. For more than 30 years the record stood as challengers failed to erase it even when they went from running yards to meters (200 meters is a little more than a yard short of 220 yards).

Gary won a Class A regional that year, but ran into eventual world-record holder Herb Washington of Flint Central at the state meet.

"The first time I looked up I could barely see Herb, he was that far ahead," Whitmire recalled. "I was just a runner who happened to have a good time for this area. I wasn't setting the world on fire."

But he did have the Flushing record and he played football and ran track at Hillsdale College, where he often raced against Washington, who starred at Michigan State. The Flushing record was one his son wanted.

Mike is a senior who started on Flushing's football and basketball teams. He, too, is a fine sprinter. Two years ago, he ran the 100 meters and broke the school record formerly held by his brother, Thomas, a student at Michigan State.

"The plan was for Mike to break the 400 record," his father said. "Then all three of us would have our names on the gym wall. When he broke Thomas' record he was apologetic. He said: 'I wasn't trying to do it. I was just trying to win a race.' That's why I've been calling him 'The Thief.' "

But Mike made no apologies about trying to break his dad's record. Everywhere he has gone around town this past year, people have been asking him when he was going to break his dad's record.

All of a sudden, seeing his dad's name on the gym wall wasn't so neat after all.

It didn't help that dear old dad is an assistant principal at Flushing, so the record was always a topic of conversation.

"The pressure kept on getting more and more as I had less meets," Mike said. "Everybody wanted me to do it -- the team, the coaches, my family and my friends. Every time somebody mentioned the 200 my stomach would get all nervous."

The night before last week's dual meet against Davison, Whitmire became an Eagle Scout. The next day he set out to run against Ryan Meyer. Whitmire and Meyer are the fastest sprinters in the Big Nine.

Whitmire won the 100 meters in 10.94, his fastest time this season, and then set a personal best of 51.46 in winning the 400 meters. Then it was time for the 200 meters.

"I was a little bit tired," Whitmire said. "The 400 kind of takes a bit out of me. But going against fast competition got me pumped up."

Whitmire and Meyer were locked in a neck-and-neck race and Meyer nosed out Whitmire for the victory. After congratulating Meyer, Whitmire turned around and saw his father and coach George Hackney.

"They were jumping around in the air with their arms up," Whitmire said. "I knew instantly they weren't jumping around for second. Then a timer showed me my time."

Whitmire ran 22.53, beating his dad's record by seven-hundredths of a second.

"My dad came up and gave me a hug and everybody came out of the stands and started taking pictures of me and my dad," he said. "I think my dad was more excited than I was."

Of course his father was immeasurably happier than his son. It was one of those rare father-son moments few people ever have the opportunity to experience.

Mike will realize that one day, but it probably won't be for several years until he has a son of his own.

"This isn't just my record," Gary said. "This is my son. I'm handing something down to him, in a sense. This is probably the greatest thrill I ever had in my life. I'm the proudest dad in America."

A 3.5 student, Whitmire has been accepted to the Lyman Briggs School for science at Michigan State.

He probably won't follow his dad's footsteps and run track in college, but he did just fine in high school.

"I wanted to prove I was the fastest in my family," Mike said. "I proved it with my brother and I had to beat my dad's record. Now I want to beat his record by even more to really show who's the fastest."

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