

Running is lifelong pursuit for Cole

Meridian standout making big plans for Times Classic and beyond  
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SANFORD - The first time Ryan Cole ran a road race, he was so far behind the front of the pack, the rescue unit was the only thing behind him, and even it had to slow at times so Cole could stop and toss pebbles in the storm drains.

Of course, Cole was only a year old in 1983 when he ran the one-mile race in the Deckerville Homecoming celebration.

Times have changed.

The Sanford Meridian senior heads into The Bay City Times Classic looking to add to his considerable list of accomplishments and is the favorite to win the 3200 run and challenge for the 1600 title as well. The 13th annual area high school meet, which is set for Friday at the Bangor John Glenn track, will open with field events at 4:30 and running prelims at 5. Running finals are set to start at 6 p.m.

"Last good race I ever ran, that's what my dad says," Cole said of his first competition. "He won't let me forget it, either."

All kidding aside, Bob Cole, Ryan's father, knows just how good his son's more recent races have been. Cole, the Meridian boys track coach, has been an important figure in Ryan's life.

"It's been both good and bad - if I could do it over again, I don't know if I would have him as a coach, but I do know that I'll miss it when we can't run together anymore," the younger Cole said. "We have a little different philosophy on training, but he lets me do just what I need to do to prepare for racing."

The two worked together this spring to lay out plans to deal with a nagging bit of tendonitis in Ryan's Achilles tendon. Knowing that future plans - such as running track at Michigan, Oregon or Wisconsin next year - lay ahead, the pair decided to cut back, not just on training but on running some events that Ryan was looking forward to competing in.

"My goal was to get 300 points this year, and I was on course to get that before this (injury) crept up," Cole said. "I was planning to run the 800, 1600, 3200 - then two days before the SVSU Indoor meet in March, my heel started hurting. I ran (at SVSU) and that was stupid, because I couldn't even walk the next day.

"But I can't control those things. I had to just reevaluate things and decide that my main goal now is to win the state (3200) title," he added. "I'm running the 1600 at (The Times Classic) and looking forward to it, but it'll be one of the last times I run it this year."

The elder Cole knows that with the Times meet and the state meet coming up, Ryan's long high school career is coming to a close.

"We never really pushed him to track. He decided on his own to give up football and basketball and dedicate himself to running," Bob Cole said. "It's been fun and it's nice to have something like this in common, but we have our moments when we don't agree. Sometimes I'll be glad to have it over with."

The Achilles injury has forced Ryan to cut back on training and, while he holds the current Times area best in the 3200 (9:15.0 - some 35 seconds ahead of the next-best time), he feels his times could be much better.

"I was running a lot faster last winter, but my time is starting to come down," he said. "It doesn't hurt at all when I run, but it hurts like crazy the next day. It's kind of dragged down the season, since I've had to cut my training in half."

He's happy, though, that teammate Mike Gray has come on strong this year. The Times area leader in the 800 (2:00.06) and with the third-best time in the 1600 (4:28.00), Gray is no longer just another competitor to Cole.

"We used to be big rivals, but we've both matured alot and now we're much better at being teammates," Cole said. "Sometimes I'm not an easy person to be around, especially when I'm not running well, and it's been good having Mike there. He's improved a lot this year and that competition between us isn't so strong."

Both Cole and Gray will face off against defending Times Classic champ Todd Falker of Tawas in the 1600, while Cole will battle defending champ Jordan Emmorey of Gaylord in the 3200. Other returning champs include Reese's Tom Maczik in the shot put and discus, Jewel Pearson of Bay City Central in the 110 hurdles, Pat Snable of Central in the 400 and Enoch Green of Bay City Western in the 800.

"I'm gonna try to run to win (The Times meet)," Cole said. "I've got some things to prove and I'll be looking forward to it."

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