

Runner's life back on track

Friday, May 26, 2000

Kenya Moses is absolutely graceful running over hurdles, both on the track and in her personal life.

She blew away the field in the 100-meter hurdles on Thursday, but didn't step out of the spotlight for long.

About 10 minutes later she was breaking the tape for Muskegon High on the anchor leg of the 800-meter relay for the second of her four medals on the day.

Those nearly back-to-back wins sent many of the sun-soaked fans at the 22nd annual West Michigan Invitational Track Meet at Orchard View High School scurrying for their programs to find out about her. The basic information was there - Moses is a Muskegon High junior with some incredibly fast times.

But her story goes way beyond that.

No way would anyone guess that this 5-7, 123-pound waif of a runner is a mom.

Believe it. The multi-talented Moses, one of the finest girls high school athletes in the area, has a 10-month-old baby boy - A-Mon Brower, who was born on July 12, 1999.

"I certainly don't recommend for any high school girl to go out and get pregnant," said Moses, 17, who is an unwed mother. "It was really hard for a little while, but I already feel like I've grown up so much.

"I know this isn't the ideal way to do things, but that's what happened and I can guarantee you it's not going to happen again for a long time."

It's truly amazing the performance Moses put on under ideal running conditions Thursday, finishing as one of the meet's most decorated athletes with wins in the 100 hurdles (15.34 ) and 800-relay, leading her team to third in the 400-relay and taking sixth in the long jump (15-7).

The story turns incredible when you back up to six months after giving birth, when Moses was establishing herself as a dominating middle hitter last winter for the Big Reds' volleyball team.

Then it gets downright scary to think that she was the most valuable player on the Muskegon High varsity girls basketball team last fall, despite starting practice just one month after giving birth.

The neatest thing about Moses is that she does it all with a smile on her face and a spring in her step.

"I've never seen her get down or mad," said Muskegon girls track coach Marian Townsend. "Kenya is very positive and outgoing all the time, which is why she's one of our captains. Sports has been very good for her

through all this. This is where she belongs. She would be upset just sitting around with the baby all the time."

But it wasn't always easy. Especially when she first learned of her pregnancy in the fall of her sophomore year.

Moses was a three-sport freshman phenom the year before, bursting onto the track scene at this same meet, winning the 200-meter dash and taking second in the 100 meters and 100 hurdles.

She played basketball as a sophomore, before her pregnancy forced her to the sidelines.

This is where the story ends for many kids. A great athlete with a world of promise meets a major challenge - anything from the temptation of drugs, to a family breakup, to an unwanted pregnancy - and that talent simply fades away, never to be heard from again.

Moses avoided that trap by never allowing herself to get out of the loop, coming right back for the Big Reds' first basketball practice last fall.

"My doctor said I was in great shape and that I could play if I wanted," said Moses, whose GPA is near 3.0.

Her quick return to sports was made possible by a strong support system, led by her mother, Gladys Bell, and four step-sisters.

But the driving force behind her comeback is her natural charisma, a special personality trait which great athletes seem to share.

The last 10 months certainly have not been a breeze for Moses, but based on the way she calmly ran away from the field and then answered questions about her difficult situation on Thursday, she seems to have hurdled a potentially devastating roadblock.

Gracefully.

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