

For the second straight year, sprinters Charles Rogers and Stuart Schweigert will face off in the state finals.

June 1, 2000

BY MICK McCABE  
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

For the better part of a year, the rivalry wasn't much of a rivalry.

Charles Rogers of Saginaw High and Stuart Schweigert of Saginaw Heritage were the two best sprinters in the Saginaw Valley League, but each time they raced the result was the same. Rogers crossed the finish line first.

Oh, they had some good races in the 100 and 200 meters. In fact, each time they met it seemed that Schweigert closed the gap a bit. Schweigert would get close, but never closer than second place.

However, everything changed a year ago this weekend when Rogers and Schweigert ran in the Class A state championship meet. Schweigert went back to Saginaw as the 100-meter champion, and the rivalry took on new meaning.

The two will collide again Saturday at Rockford in the Division 1 championship meet, and it will be the last time these outstanding rivals compete as high schoolers.

Rogers is the state's top athlete. An all-state wide receiver in football who signed with Michigan State, Rogers was also a standout in basketball. He didn't compete in track until his sophomore year.

"In ninth grade I didn't know after football and basketball if I wanted to put too much into track," Rogers said. "It wasn't a big thing to me. But in the 10th grade our principal, Doc Smith, said he didn't want me to miss a beat. He kind of talked me into going out for track."

Because he hadn't competed in the sport, Rogers didn't know what to expect when he stepped onto the track for the first time.

"I knew I was kind of fast," he said. "I remember playing against a guy from Flint Southwestern in football and he was fast. Everybody said he

was the fastest guy in the Valley. When I beat him I knew I had a chance of doing something."

That spring, Rogers set the state track world on its ear. In the county meet, just a few days before the state meet, Rogers was named the most outstanding performer. He awarded his medal to teammate Darius Mask.

"He was a senior and he put in his four years," Rogers said. "He was the guy pushing me every day in practice, making me better."

A few days later, Rogers won state championships in the 100 meters in 10.70 seconds and the 200 in 21.67, and soon the rest of the state knew what the people of Saginaw had been talking about for months. A star was born.

"I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew I had a chance to bring home a medal," Rogers said. "After I crossed the line in the 100 I felt relieved. I had a big smile on my face. I felt as if I had accomplished something."

He accomplished even more a couple of hours later when he won the 200.

"Being only a sophomore," he said, "I knew I accomplished something great."

Like Rogers, Schweigert is a sensational athlete. He, too, was a dream team all-state football player. He was the state's best option quarterback and signed to play defensive back at Purdue. He also excelled in basketball and last week was named one of the state's top 10 scholar athletes by the Free Press.

As a sophomore, Schweigert didn't qualify for the finals in the 100 or 200, but was there as a member of the 400-meter relay team. The next year he became a champion sprinter.

"I don't know what happened to me," he said. "Maybe my body matured. I didn't do any special training. It just happened. I played football and basketball and felt stronger."

Schweigert's times in the 100 and 200 began dropping as the season progressed and in the 100 final he beat Rogers, 10.60 to 10.68.

"It was awesome!" Schweigert recalled. "I ran really relaxed. I just didn't worry about winning. I just knew I was going to run well. I didn't try to overdo it. I kind of took it in stride."

Rogers knew from the opening seconds of the race that he was in trouble.

"I looked up and he had the best jump he ever had," Rogers said. "It was just a tremendous start."

At the same time Rogers figured he was in trouble, Schweigert realized he was headed for a state title.

"It was a great start," Schweigert agreed. "When I got out, I didn't see anybody on either side of me."

Although disappointed about the 100 finish, Rogers captured the 400-meter title in 47.82. A bit later he attempted to defend his 200 title.

Everyone knew Schweigert would be a contender, but no one expected much from Portage Northern sophomore Kelly Baraka, who edged Rogers, 21.66 to 21.70. Schweigert was third in 21.73.

Fatigue set in for Rogers during the 200 and Schweigert had problems of his own.

"About 120 meters into the 200, my right hamstring cramped up," Schweigert said. "I was winning it when it cramped and I almost quit. I thought I was going to win it. I still finished third even though I was running gimpy."

Although Rogers and Schweigert are rivals, they are not enemies. Far from it. They have a deep mutual respect for each other.

"We talk on the phone and we hung out a few times," Rogers said. "Track made it into a rivalry, but we're friends. He'll call me or I'll call him. We became closer when we were being recruited."

Like Rogers, Schweigert was highly recruited by MSU, but he chose Purdue for its technology school.

"We had a lot of the same coaches calling us," Schweigert said. "We went to some camps together and we went to Michigan games together."

"He's a nice guy. He never talks down about anybody. He never feels he's too good to talk to somebody. Some guys try to think they're too good and they'll ignore guys. He's real friendly."

Of course, Rogers may not seem too friendly this weekend. He hopes to reclaim his titles in the 100 and 200 meters, but will not compete in the 400.

"Last year, I came in as the top seed, the undefeated champ," Rogers said. "When you're the challenger you try a little harder. This year I'm going in as the challenger."

Rogers will be the challenger only in the sense that he didn't win the 100 or 200 last year. This season he has defeated Schweigert in both events all three times they have met -- including the county meet Tuesday night.

"This season has been a lot like last year," Schweigert said. "He's beating me, but I'm getting closer."

This Rogers-Schweigert rivalry has been played up in Saginaw all spring, and this week it will be the talk of the state.

"Up here, our paper makes a big deal out of it every time we race," Schweigert said. "It gets a little old. They put the same picture in the paper. It sort of wears on you."

Well, the good news is, the rivalry will be finished after Saturday's championship meet.

Or will it?

This fall, Rogers will be a freshman wide receiver at Michigan State. Schweigert will be a freshman defensive back at Purdue. Both are Big Ten schools.

Oops.

The next phase of the rivalry will be, can Schweigert cover Rogers and can Rogers beat Schweigert deep?

"Oh yeah, I've thought about that," Schweigert said. "People up here have already mentioned that."

This rivalry might be just beginning.

</HTML>