

Michigan school runs down six crowns Ritzenhein blows past top field in 2-mile to lead Rockford's charge

By Carolyn White
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RALEIGH, N.C. -- Brad Prins, the distance coach for Rockford (Mich.) High, has this advice for his proteges: "'Keep your mouth shut and let your feet do the talking.'"

If so, Dathan Ritzenhein's feet delivered a message of oratorical splendor at the Foot Locker Outdoor Track and Field Championships Friday and Saturday at North Carolina State. So did Rockford's distance relay teams, which won five other Foot Locker titles.

Ritzenhein, a junior and the national prep cross-country champion, decimated what was expected to be a highly competitive field in the boys two-mile. His 8:48.06 finish put him 50 meters and 8.34 seconds in front of his nearest competitor, Nick Schneider of Victoria, Minn. (8:56.40). Don Sage of York High in Elmhurst, Ill., touted as Ritzenhein's biggest two-mile competitor, finished a disappointing eighth in 9:05.99.

Twelve hours later, at 9 a.m. Saturday, Ritzenhein was anchoring Rockford's 4xmile relay to a 17:21.57 win. No. 2 York High of Elmhurst, Ill., anchored by Sage, finished in 17:23.40.

Just before midnight, in a meet delayed one hour in the evening because of rain, Ritzenhein anchored Rockford's distance medley relay to a 10:03.9 win.

Rockford did not win by Ritzenhein alone. Its girls won all three distance relays -- the 4x800 by 11 seconds in 8:57.5, the 4xmile relay in a national record 20:30.57 and the distance medley in a meet record 11:49.44.

Of the 1,700 competitors from 45 states who competed, five qualified for next month's Olympic Trials.

That includes Dwight Thomas, a premier prep sprinter competing for Northwestern High in Hyattsville, Md., whose 10.14-second run in the 100 meters (just short of the national prep record of 10.13) was good enough to qualify him for the trials in his native Jamaica.

Muna Lee of Kansas City, Mo., won the girls 100 in a meet-record 11.39. At 5-7, 106 pounds, she said, "'I'm the skinniest one competing.'" The LSU recruit finished with a state Class 4A record 10 gold medals. "'I was expecting the girls with the muscles to win.'"

Sheena Johnson of Gar-Field High in Woodbridge, Va., who won four state titles at last week's Virginia state meet and who heads for UCLA with 15 state championships, overcame a dust storm near the seventh and eighth hurdles to win the 400 meter hurdles in 57.55. The Olympic qualifying benchmark was 57.80. Johnson also was an unexpected winner in the triple jump with a 41-foot, 7-inch effort.

Paul Klemic, a Northeastern University-bound high jumper from Mainland Regional High in Somers Point, N.J., who had cleared 7-2 heading in, went 7-4 1/2 to qualify for the July 14-23 trials in Sacramento but missed a national record attempt at 7-6.

In the girls pole vault, Amy Linnen of Mount Sinai, N.Y., jumped 13-0.25 to just meet the Olympic Trials qualifying standard.

Despite two victories -- in the 400-meter intermediate hurdles and the 110 high hurdles, Ricky Harris of Centreville, Va., left disappointed. "I won, but I blew it," says Harris, who won the 400 hurdles in 51.14 after posting 50.26 last month. "I wanted to leave high school with a national record."

In an inspiring show of potential, Oklahoma sophomore Kevin Bookout (6-7, 235) won both the shot put (65-6) and discus (193-4), and junior Ryan Hall of Big Bear Lake, Calif., won the boys mile in 4:06.15.

Ritzenhein, who decided to run the two-mile only last Wednesday, says he wanted to win convincingly. "I didn't want to leave it down to the last 400 meters," he said. He moved into the lead on the third lap and thrilled the crowd as his lead grew with each lap. "But he wasn't trying to break the national record of 8:36. "Ninety degrees is not record-setting temperatures," he said.

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