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## Mallon Sprints To State Title In Record-Breaking Time

Submitted by admin on Fri, 03/06/2009 - 04:51.

By Alex Frazier



For most of indoor track season, Tom Mallon was studying the back of Mike Palmisano's head.

It drained his confidence.

And he even began to doubt his coach's training philosophy.

"It was frustrating, especially towards the beginning of the season when we saw Upper Dublin and all the other guys running really fast times," said Mallon. "We were just running mediocre. We were kind of doubting the training our coaches were giving us. It wasn't working and we weren't improving, but I guess it really paid off."

For most of indoor track season, the Central Bucks South junior had to be content with running slower times than he was capable of.

Which meant he often watched other runners like Upper Dublin's Palmisano precede him to the finish line.

"He was beating me every weekend," said Mallon. "I kind of had a lack of confidence that I wasn't going to beat him."

Trust the coaches.

"We were really training them for outdoor," said South coach Mike Cox. "Our whole goal was outdoor states. Indoor states is a step along the way. Training in December and January was purposefully making them not able to run times that would be stellar performances. It wasn't that they were running bad; they just weren't running their fastest yet. It was hard for them to be patient like that."

But as often is the case, patience was rewarded.

Mallon beat Palmisano for the first time at the Meet of Champions, which set the stage for the state meet.

In the Pennsylvania Track Coaches Association's State Indoor Championships at Penn State, Mallon got his revenge on Palmisano, as he surged past the Upper Dublin senior with 150 meters to go to capture the state title, and in the process turn in the best time in the nation—1:51.79.

Mallon's previous best indoors was 1:57, so Cox was expecting a time around 1:53 or 1:54.

"It was a pretty big surprise," said Mallon. "I was definitely hoping to win, but I wasn't expecting such a fast time. My coach said the state record was 1:53 and he said I could probably get that. That was pretty much all I was shooting for."

"I didn't think he was quite ready to run that," said Cox. "That was a pleasant surprise."

Not only had he shattered the existing state record of 1:53.53 set by Joe Plevelich of West Chester Henderson in 2001, but his time was just .88 of a second off the national record set by Michael Granville of Bell Gardens, Calif.

"I was surprised at the time he ran," said Cox, "but I was confident he could win the race. He broke the race down and figured out exactly how they would race against him and how he could exploit that to win."

Ironically, Mallon had been training to run the mile, but Cox didn't think he had enough miles in.

"He hadn't done the mileage training-wise to be the best in the mile, so I figured the 800 was the best one for him," said Cox. "Next year we'll focus on the mile and the 800. This year we'll stay with the 800 and the 4x800."

It was a smart decision.

"I guess it was good I did all that distance training because it gave me some endurance to keep up with Palmisano at states," said Mallon.

Mallon started running track in seventh grade just to stay in shape for football.

"I was pretty good at it, so I kept it up," he said.

By the time he reached high school at South in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, he knew he wasn't going to be big enough to play football, so he started running cross country.

"He was good in middle school, but not what he is now," said Cox.

In addition to setting the state record in the 800, he was also a member of the 4x800 team that won the state title, just missing another record by .02 of a second.

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Mallon's split of 1:52.85, just an hour and half after his win in the open 800, still surpassed what Cox thought he was capable of running.

"That's good news," said Cox.

Mallon has made some incredible strides since he began running. Two years ago his indoor 800 time was 2:05. Last year he finished eighth in the state indoors and won the PIAA Spring Track 800-meter championship.

"He's definitely progressing pretty well, and I don't think he's reached his limits yet," Cox said. "He's a great kid. I couldn't ask for more in him and the other guys. We get along well. They trust what we're doing in the program, and this season was a perfect example."

On March 15, Mallon will put his national time on the line in Boston at the Nike Nationals.

Last year he and his 4x800 teammates went to outdoor nationals and didn't do too well.

"As a meet that humbled those guys and made them realize they still have a lot of work to do, and put everything in perspective," said Cox. "Going to nationals, there are a lot of goals.

"Of course it's in our mind that Tom could possibly get a national record and could win, and the 4x800 could win, but we're not focusing on that. We're focusing on going there and doing the best we can, race the way we need to race and let what happens happen. That was the mindset we had at states too."

Mallon said it would feel strange going to Nationals as the runner with the fastest time.

"At outdoor Nationals I was a no-name. I was looking up to all those guys I had seen on the Internet. This year I'm No. 1. It feels weird," he said. "There's definitely going to be pressure, but I'm just going to try to have fun with it. I always seem to do good when it counts."

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