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Central Bucks South: They just wanted to run fast

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Published: 2009-03-03 11:00:00



They just wanted to run fast.

They knew they could because they had done so before. The toughest part was biding their time, waiting for the appropriate moment.

With the shackles of their early season training finally removed, the Central Bucks South foursome of Jeff Dickson, Dave Manion, Matt Poiesz and Tom Mallon did let it rip, posting a season-best 7:49.01 to win the 4x800 meter relay at the PTFCAs Indoor Championships.

It was the first foray under eight minutes for the team that was considered the favorite based largely on its personnel returning from its fourth-place performance of 7:46.32 last spring, even though Abington entered the meet as the top seed.

"This is the moment we've been waiting for," said Dickson (*Jeff Dickson - lead-off of 1:58.19*), who led off in 1:58.19. "We've been training for this since June. That's what we've been looking at, knowing we can run that time. We didn't break [eight minutes] until this meet, but we knew we could do it. Just running it here feels great to be back at that level. All we wanted to do all season was run as fast as we could. The training was tough and we knew at some point we would pull through.



"Every time a team really posted a fast time, our coach kept reminding us that we can beat them because of what we've done in the past. As intimidating as Abington's 7:57 was, our coach told us we can beat them. We all believed in that."

Trust has become an integral part of the formula for success at South. How else can you explain their willingness and patience to train smart rather than race hard, focusing on the bigger picture while others were frolicking in the early season success expected by this bunch?

"[Coach Mike Cox] just kept reminding us what we did last year, and our actual potential and how hard we had been training compared to previous years," said Manion.

(Dave Manion - 2nd leg of 1:58.89)

Another tangible reminder came

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back in December, months before the indoor state championships, when the foursome received a letter from their coach.

The message was simple. It was to remind them of their lofty goals and objectives for the upcoming season. In order, they were listed as: 1.) Outdoor States; 2.) Penn Relays; 3.) Indoor States.

Nowhere in the missive will you find setting records before Christmas listed. Priorities had to be set.

"Everything had to meet those objectives," CB South coach Mike Cox said. "All of their training from December to January to February had everything in mind of getting ready for outdoor. What that meant was, in my opinion, is you can't run fast in December and January if you want to run fast in May."

Still the kids are competitive, and at times, they were getting antsy. It was difficult watching teams they

felt they could defeat continue to post superior performances when their only proof of progress were the workout times they were running this year compared to last. Cox tried to further enhance his position of patience by showing his group that quick early season times posted in years past rarely equated to late season success.

"The thing that I am very happy with, they had to put a lot of trust in what we were doing," Cox said. "They had to put a lot of trust in my coaching and the program to say, 'It's going to be there. It's going to be there. Let's just be patient. I have to give a lot of credit to them for being patient and trusting what we do.'"

The 7:49.01 they ran did not only bring state gold. With it came the inevitable comparisons. Their time was only .02 slower than the indoor state record of the much-ballyhooed North Penn team of a year ago, the best team ever for a school that traditionally owns the event. A North Penn team that would challenge the Jamaicans for supremacy at Penn and chase history outdoors.

"Our goal last year was usually to come in second behind North Penn," said Poesz, who also finished fifth in the 800 with a time of 1:56.45. "They were kind of like icons of the 4x8 last year, so it's awesome to get to run as fast as them.

(Matt Poesz - 3rd leg of 1:58.97)

"We're trying to be one of the first teams in a while to beat the Jamaicans at the Penn Relays in the 4x8. That would definitely be a big highlight."

Another possible highlight would be eclipsing the PIAA and National Federation record of 7:36.24 set by Wissahickon in 1982. It's a mark that came under heavy fire from North Penn a year ago.

If there was ever a year the record was going to fall, surely it was last, with NP's talented foursome. But even that team, despite winning in a school record 7:38.79, fell short, leaving you to wonder what would have happened had they been pushed. Norristown was the closest pursuer, finishing second in 7:45.44. It was further proof that even with the most talented of teams, the stars are going to have to align for it to happen.

So naturally, after Dickson (1:58.19), Manion (1:58.89), Poesz (1:58.97) and Mallon (1:52.96) came within a slice of cheese of putting themselves on equal footing as the North Penn group, the talk resumes.



Could this be the year? Could C.B. South be the team?

The mark will be difficult to reach, but South may have two things in its favor that North Penn did not: Upper Dublin and Mallon.

Unlike North Penn, C.B. South will be challenged. Upper Dublin, which won the Distance Medley in a runaway indoors, will be one of the strong contenders along with North Penn and Abington in the 4x8 at the outdoor champs.



How good will that showdown be? Well consider four of the top five finishers in the 800 meters at the indoor state meet were members of either CB South or Upper Dublin.

(Tom Mallon - anchor of 1:52.96)

Then there is Mallon, the reigning PA 800 meter King, who smashed the indoor state record by nearly two seconds. And to think, Mallon began the season concentrating on the mile. It was only after he won the 800 at the MOC a week before the state meet that he decided to stick with the 800 for now.

Smart move, considering his 1:51.79 (56, 55) was the second fastest indoor performance ever by a junior behind Michael Granville, who went on to establish the National Federation mark of 1:46.45,

running for Bell Garden HS in California in 1996.

"I think the training for the mile helped me," Mallon said. "The tempos that we did helped my endurance."

Mallon also claimed the 800 at the PIAA outdoor champs last spring, clocking 1:52.35. He could be a threat to crack the PIAA outdoor mark of 1:50.31 set by Mark Fowler of Penn Wood in 1984.

If Manion, Dickson and Poesz can set it up, obviously Mallon has the goods to finish. Maybe only Brad Lidge has a better record as a closer over the past year.

Of course, for now Cox prefers to leave the conjecture to the message boards. But a top-notch showing against US #1 Albemarle and #2 Morris Hills (NJ) at the Nike Indoor Nationals on March 15 in Boston would certainly add fuel to an already raging fire.

"My message to them and our focus is to concentrate on our performances," Cox said. "Let's just look at the training. Let's look at every day and every meet as a stepping-stone, and if we put our focus and attention there, the results will happen naturally. Certainly, there are goals out there. Let's keep ourselves grounded. Let's focus on the little things that have gotten us to where we are now. We're trying not to focus on those aspects. We're trying to focus on doing the best that we can. And if it happens, it happens."



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