

With injury healed, Rockford hurdler sets sights on state title



McKibben's records

These are Courtney McKibben's Rockford Christian school records:

55-meter hurdles: 8.60 seconds (2010)

100-meter hurdles: 14.76 (2009)

300-meter hurdles: 48.16 (2010)

Long jump: 16-2 1/2 (2010)

High jump: 4-10 (2008)

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Rockford Christian High School hurdler Courtney McKibben practices the hurdles at the RCHS track on Monday, April 12.

By Doug Goodman

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ROCKFORD —

Courtney McKibben hopes her pain is in the past and a state title is in her future.

Two years ago, as a Rockford Christian sophomore, she finished fourth in the 100-meter hurdles at the Class 1A state meet behind three seniors. She figured the state title would be well within her reach the next year.

But an activity off the track derailed her title quest.

“I was doing cheerleading,” McKibben said. “I guess I wasn’t executing the (tumbling) skills right and ended up twisting wrong. I got stress fractures in my right tibia.”

The injury wiped out nearly her entire indoor track schedule as a junior and left her dealing with soreness during the outdoor season.

“I didn’t feel that much pain during the races last year because there is so much adrenaline,” she said. “It was after the race when I felt it.”

Her training was limited by the injury. However, her father, Kelly, who coaches the Rockford Christian hurdlers and high jumpers, devised a special workout program to improve her skills while not causing more damage.

“We trained her with 50 percent of the workload every other day,” he said. “That was all I could do. Any more than that she started getting hurt again.”

The limited workouts, plus McKibben’s natural ability and perseverance, were enough to carry her to a second consecutive 100 hurdles sectional title with a personal-best and meet record 14.76 (hand-held). It also earned her another trip to state, where she took fifth (15.40).

“She didn’t run as well as we would have liked at state, but she got there,” her father said. McKibben avoided tumbling and other cheerleading routines that put stress on her leg this school year.

“I’ve made my priority track,” said McKibben, who has accepted a track scholarship from Division II St. Joseph’s College in Indiana.

Her renewed focus paid off at the Illinois Prep Top Times Indoor Classic last month at Bloomington. She won the 55 hurdles title (8.60) in a photo finish with Riverdale’s Alexa Allen, who figures to be one of her leading competitors at outdoor state in May.

“I want to go after the (state) title this year,” she said. “That is my main goal, and just get some good PRs.”

McKibben discovered she had hurdling abilities as a youngster in Belvidere.

“The first time I ever saw her hurdle was at an elementary school track and field day,” her father said. “They had her run over five plastic hurdles stuck in the lawn with a chalk line. She set a school record that day.”

She added conference hurdles titles at Belvidere Middle School before arriving at Rockford Christian.

“And over the years I can’t image not running hurdles,” she said. “It is such a big part of my life now, it would be weird not running hurdles.”

This season McKibben still feels some pain from the stress fractures, but nothing compared with last year. She tries to be cautious, but trains as hard as she can.

“She is looking great,” said head coach Jen Sprecher. “As long as she stays healthy, she is definitely in the hunt for the state title.

“On a good day she can give the boys a good run for their money.”

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