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State track meet to be overloaded with talent

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STATE TRACK MEET TO BE
OVERLOADED WITH TALENT

bill schwanke
5/13/69
sports one +

MISSOULA--- **Information Services • University of Montana • Missoula, Montana 59801 • (406) 243-2522**

There's no doubt about it: this year's State Track Meet at the University of Montana's Dornblaser Stadium May 23-24 is going to be a great one!

Four reasons why are Mark Beckwith, Gary Rankin, Mel Rice and Rich Charlson.

Beckwith, already highly regarded as one of the state's best basketball prospects, is also doing a fine job for the Columbia Falls Wildcats in track and field.

The 6-7, 180-pound 17-year-old, who has named Montana State University as his collegiate choice, competes at his best in the high and low hurdles, the triple jump and the high jump. On the side, he pulls down a B average in his classwork.

For his best efforts, Beckwith has done 15.1 seconds in the highs, 20.6 in the lows, 6 feet in the high jump and 41-7 3/4 in the triple jump.

"Mark is a very hard-working athlete and he's very easy to coach," said Harold Hughes, the Wildcats' cinder coach.

Rankin, 6-3, 215, and still growing, has made quite a splash state-wide in the shot put and discus throw, having gone through this spring undefeated in both events for Baker High School.

He has the state's best shot put effort with a tremendous 59-6 1/2. His discus throw of 146-7 ranks him sixth state-wide.

Ron Wirtz, Baker High coach, has nothing but praise for the 18-year-old senior.

"One thing about Gary is that he just seems to keep improving," Wirtz says. "He had a knee operation one year ago and it did slow him down for quite a while---but he is a hard worker and just keeps getting stronger and better.

"Also, Gary is very competitive and can come up with the big throw when pushed. He is not only a fine athlete, but he is also a fine student, and more important he is a gentleman."

more

Rankin carries a B-plus grade average and has qualified for academic scholarships through various entrance exams. He is a member of National Honor Society and plans to enter the teaching and coaching fields.

Rice is well known to Missoula fans as one of Hellgate's finest all-around scholar-athletes. Also a fine student, Mel hopes to qualify for entrance into one of the nation's service academies.

Coach Gus Nash thinks Rice will be a top performer in both hurdles races in the Class AA portion of the state meet. The veteran coach, who handled Rice on the basketball court as well, may be tempted to use the 6-2 senior on his relay teams.

Mel has been known to compete in the long jump and javelin throws and do quite well at both.

"The important thing about Rice is that he will do just about anything you ask him to do," Nash said, "even if he hasn't done it before."

Rice has clipped through the low hurdles in 20.3 seconds and the highs in 14.9. With efforts like these, he will be a top AA contender in both.

"Mel is well ahead of schedule as far as progress is concerned," Nash concluded. "He should hit a good peak at the time of the state meet."

Unlike the three preceding athletes, Rich Charlson of Great Falls Public High has one more year to go after this one. He's a junior, and he is only 16 years old.

Charlson, who competes for Bison coach Ralph Halverson, will put his name in the results sheet in more than one event if regular season performances are any indication.

The all-around performer can be considered a Class AA threat in five events, including the long, triple and high jumps, and the high and low hurdles.

He has the best jump to date state-wide in the long jump with 22 feet, 2 1/2 inches, is second in the high jump with 6-4, and is third in the triple jump at 43-7.

He is one of the top AA performers in the high hurdles with a 15.6-second time, and he could place if he runs equal to, or faster than, his best of 21.1 in the lows.