

Hairston overcomes stumble to star for Hawks

Written by Tom Fruehling

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IOWA CITY -- As a top-flight middle distance runner for the Iowa Hawkeyes, Adam Hairston knows it's a steady pace over the long haul that wins races. Life's like that, too.

A misstep along the way doesn't have to mean defeat.

The fifth-year senior from Cedar Rapids Kennedy will be among the favorites in the 800-meter run at the Big Ten Track and Field Championships which run Friday through Sunday at the Francis X. Cretzmeyer Track in Iowa City. His goal is to qualify for the regionals and then the nationals as he did as a junior.

In track, says the personable and gifted 22-year-old true student-athlete, "What you want is to still be running at the end of June."

Beyond that, his dream is to be running this time next year as well. That's when a qualifying meet will be held in Eugene, Ore., for the 2012 Olympics. And Hairston thinks he's got a good chance of at least making a run for the team.

His 1:48.5 personal best for the 800 meters at Iowa ranks third all-time in school history. He figures he'll need to shave two seconds or more off his time to have a shot in Oregon. But then, he's overcome the odds before.

At 17, while a senior at Kennedy, he had his dreams shattered. He was a four-year honor roll student, a good and popular kid who'd never been in trouble.

Adam was an all-stater in cross country and a four-time all-conference champ in track. Then, during the week of the high school state championships, he was declared ineligible after police arrested him and a friend for underage possession of alcohol in their parked vehicle.

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"I thought my world was ending," he recalls.

After all, he was favored to win two events at the state meet (having won the 1600 meters at the Drake Relays earlier) and even finish at or near the top in two others. But more than that, he was embarrassed and disappointed in himself, feeling he'd let down his family, friends and teammates.

"Looking back, it was just a dumb thing," he says now. "It was on senior skip day at Kennedy after the prom weekend. And we got caught with a bottle of vodka still in the car. Not consuming it, but we were underage."

Besides being a bystander at the state meet, Adam worried that the academic scholarship he'd been offered at Iowa and the opportunity to join the track team might be in danger. His folks, Ruth and John Hairston, are Iowa grads and his dad was a star basketball player in the mid 1970s.

"But Coach Wiz (Larry Wieczorek) stuck with me," Adam says. "He trusted me, and I was determined to learn from the experience and not to do anything to jeopardize that."

He's now a four-year letter winner with the Hawks and will graduate with a degree in journalism and communications studies. He's finished second in the 800-meter run in a pair of Big Ten meets and will be aiming for a league title this weekend.

Before he gets what he calls a "real job," Adam hopes to continue training leading up to the Olympic trials. He knows it won't be easy.

"But that's what I learned in high school. You take one step at a time and keep working," he says. "Just bounce back and move forward. Good things can happen."