

## Houdeshell nets 3 gold medals in wheelchair races

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Jordan Houdeshell took a sweet victory lap at Drake Stadium Saturday after winning three gold medals in wheelchair races at the state track meet.

He received a standing ovation all along the route, with total strangers leaning over the rail to shake his hand and give him high-fives.

Houdeshell, a junior from Linn-Mar High School, pumped his right fist in celebration and smiled all the way. He's proud to represent all wheelchair athletes and loves to compete.

"It's awesome to see random people actually willing to watch it, willing to come up and shake my hand," he said. "It's what I'm competing for."

Houdeshell was born with spina bifida and has no functional use of his legs. Instead of viewing his condition as a handicap, he views it as an opportunity.

He won the first-ever state cross country title for wheelchair athletes last fall and added state titles in the 100, 200 and 400 meter dashes Saturday.

Houdeshell normally competes by himself at high school track meets during the regular season, but he got some serious competition at the state meet from Drake Sachsenmeier of Camanche. They finished 1-2 in all three races and all three were extremely tight.

Houdeshell won the 100 in 20.82 seconds, with Sachsenmeier second in 21.03. He won the 200 in 37.94 seconds, with Sachsenmeier second in 39.00. And he won the 400 in an incredibly tight race that required a photo finish and automatic timer to decide.

Houdeshell won the 400 in 1 minute, 13.648 seconds and Sachsenmeier was second in 1 minute, 13.650 seconds. Houdeshell was the victor by a scant two-thousandth of a second.

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Houdeshell knew it was close as they crossed the finish line, but he didn't know it was that close. "You can see the front tire out of the corner of your eye, so I knew how close he was the entire time," he said.

"It was really that close? Wow! That was the most exciting race I've ever ran."

Linn-Mar Coach Ken Hopkins continues to marvel at Houdeshell's accomplishments.

"He runs against the clock the whole year and he grinds it out," said Hopkins. "Now he gets some competition and he PR's (sets personal records) into a headwind."

Houdeshell attended a camp for wheelchair racers last summer at the University of Illinois, where he learned about cadence, technique, training and workouts. He's chopped six seconds off his best time in the 100 meter dash and he's sliced 27 seconds off his top time in the 400.

"It definitely helped," he said.

Five wheelchair athletes competed at the state meet. They kept team scores and crowned a state champion and the winner was Jordan Houdeshell and the Linn-Mar Lions with 36 points. Camanche placed second with 29 points, followed by Southeast Polk, Des Moines East and Dubuque Senior. Houdeshell and Linn-Mar High School received a handsome award for his efforts.

Houdeshell competed in four events at the state meet last year. He finished second in three events and placed fifth in another. Houdeshell said the sport of wheelchair racing is growing and he'd like to see even more people with disabilities give it a try. "If you see anybody in a wheelchair, ask them if they do sports," he said.