

## Wensel bursts onto scene with Linn-Mar

Written by Jim Ecker

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Payton Wensel gave a hint of her immense talent last year as an eighth grader when she won the 200, 400 and 800 meter runs at the state meet for junior high school kids.

Now she's a freshman at Linn-Mar and is already a smash hit on a much bigger stage.

Wensel set a meet record in the 400 meter dash and helped Linn-Mar set another mark in the 4x800 relay as the Lions captured top honors at the 29th Annual J-Hawk Relays at Kingston Stadium.

She also ran on the triumphant 4x400 relay to finish with three gold medals in a major meet that featured 14 schools and five Metro teams.

Stephanie Jenks, a multiple state champion for Linn-Mar the past two years, broke meet records in the 1500 and 3000 and claimed the 800 as the Lions appeared ready to make a serious run at the Class 4A state title this year.

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Wensel has been a big addition to a strong program. She's made a seamless transition to the high school ranks.

"Oh my goodness. It's so different," she exclaimed. "In middle school, you don't have a lot of passionate athletes. In high school there are so many amazing athletes. It just pushes you so much harder.

"The passion that these older athletes have, it's really inspiring," she said.

Wensel ranked in the top-10 in the state in five different events as the day began. She ranked third in the 400 meter dash and fifth in the 200, as well as first in the 4x400 relay, fourth in the medley relay and eighth in the 4x800 relay with her teammates.

Wensel thought she might have broken the school record in the 400 Saturday when the scoreboard flashed her time as 57.32 seconds, but her official time was posted as 57.84 seconds. The school record is 57.35 by Ashley Williams.

"Honestly, I've been wanting to go for the school record this year," she said. "And to be able to do that as a freshman ... Well, I'd probably cry my eyes out if I found out I got it."

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