

McQuaid star revs up for Penn Relays

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"We don't consider him a sprinter," he chuckled, "but a lot of other schools would love to have him in the sprints. And we don't think of him as a bull, but he's awfully strong."

Looking for a comparison?

"He's similar to Eric Kendrick, our first great runner at McQuaid," Bradley said. "He won the mile at the Penn Relays in 1966. Brad will try to do the equivalent of that two weeks from Friday when he runs the 1,500 down there (Philadelphia) at the same meet."

Sumner, who seems genuinely embarrassed by the attention his milestones have received, will run anything from the 200 to the 3,200 this outdoor season, which begins with a meet against Marshall tomorrow afternoon at McQuaid.

"He could run some 200s, just to work on his speed for the 400," Bradley said. "And he could even pop up and run a 3,200 to get some endurance for the 1,500."

But make no mistake: it's the middle distances in which Sumner truly excels.

"The half-mile is definitely his best event," Bradley said. "And I think a lot of college coaches are looking at him as a terrific miler, with extra growth and maturity."

Sumner, who carries an academic average of 89 on a scale of 100, has narrowed his college choices to Villanova, Syracuse, Rutgers and Penn State. He is in the process of making a final selection.

He might have been choosing among traditional baseball powers instead. That sport was his first love until the summer after his sophomore year. An injury and a bad season playing for an American Legion team in Binghamton, where he lived with his father, changed all that.

"I always thought I'd be a ballplayer," he said. "But I gradually realized that track was my best sport. I had a bad season that summer, and a good indoor track season the previous winter. I was ninth in the state in the 300 meters as a sophomore."

Relay races were the "hook" that really got Sumner into track.

SUMNER'S NUMBERS

Here's what McQuaid High School's Brad Sumner has done this year:

□ National record

Indoor 600 meters (1:19.56, set March 11 in State Meet at Cornell)

□ Best times in U.S.

Indoor 800 meters (1:55.29, set March 12 in National Championships at Annapolis, Md.)

Indoor 1,000 meters (2:27.32, set Feb. 10 in Vitalis Meet at East Rutherford, N.J.)

"I didn't have much of a bead on him when he first came out," Bradley said. "But eventually we realized we had two terrific quarter-milers in Brad and Scott Romanowski. We told them they could be part of a state champion if they stuck with it."

"The relays really intrigued Brad. I don't think he came up thinking he could be this good personally. He Gave relays the top priority."

The two-mile relay team of Chris Adin, Chris Cusack, Romanowski and Sumner won the National Scholastic Indoor Championships at New Haven, Conn., last winter.

With Jason Fahy and Mickey Stone replacing Adin and Cusack, the Knights successfully defended their title March 12 at this season's national meet in Annapolis, Md.

It capped off an incredible winter for Sumner. Check these datelines:

□ EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J., Feb. 10 — Sumner is locked in a 1,000-meter showdown with Albany's Todd Orvis, the state mile champion, and Ernesto Perez of Newark, N.J., at the Vitalis Invitational in the Meadowlands Arena. Despite running on boards for the only time all season, Sumner runs 2:27.32 — the fastest time in the country this year and the eighth best all-time.

"It's kinda neat to run on the boards," he said. "The only difference is the turns are banked. You've gotta get used to that. But it was a fast track."

□ ITHACA, March 11 — Running in the state indoor meet at Cornell, Sumner holds off Warren Nurse of Brooklyn and wins the 600 meters in 1:19.56. It's a national record, breaking the old mark of 1:20.34 set by Brooklyn's Ian Jones.

"I planned on breaking the record there."

Sumner said. "It's one of the better tracks and the air in there is pretty dry. Even as the race started, the announcer said we're going for a national record. It's almost like they expected it."

Sumner said it was his most satisfying accomplishment in track — and not just because he set a national record.

"It was one of the few times I really, truly put 100 percent into it," he said.

Bradley agreed.

"We have a picture of him really grimacing as he crosses the finish line," he said. "We hardly ever see him look like that."

□ ANNAPOLIS, Md., March 12 — Just 24 hours after setting the 600 record, Sumner runs the year's fastest time in the 800 (1:55.29) at the National Scholastic Indoor Championships at Navy. Then, he had to sweat it out as Ricky Jordan of Long Island ran a 1:55.40 in the next heat.

"Jordan was mis-seeded," Bradley said. "That was not good. He should have been in the fast heat with Brad. It would have been disastrous if he nipped Brad's record without ever running against him head-to-head."

Sumner thinks he is just scratching the surface of his potential, particularly in the 800 meters.

"As far as I'm concerned, I don't think I'm that good yet," he said. "I haven't run a great time yet."

He'll get no argument from his coach.

"He's really only beginning to find out what's there," Bradley said. "He's far from being burned out. He can go a long way yet."