

Cook Signs With ASU

Written by Mike Kelly
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Watauga High senior Sydney Cook made it official Wednesday afternoon as she signed her national letter of intent to continue her track career at Appalachian State University next fall.

And Cook, who is strongly contending for the state record of 12-feet, one-inch set by former Pioneer Sally Gurganus in 2006, is hitting her stride at the right time. She came very close to the mark on Wednesday at a tri-meet at Jack Groce Stadium, where she cleared the bar with a personal-best effort of 11-9.

"I fully expect her to clear 12 feet by this weekend (at the Taco Bell Invitational)," said WHS pole-vaulting coach Daniel Isaacs. "She had a couple of good looks at (clearing 12 feet on Wednesday), but it just didn't come together. But it's a mindset. Everything has to fall into place, from the running start, to planting the pole, the lift and the turn. I'm very confident in Sydney." And well he should be. After all, Cook has put together an impressive resume competing for the Pioneers. Last year alone, she was a state runner-up at the indoor championships in the pole vault, and she was named the outdoor female athlete of the year in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference.

Her biggest obstacle was getting over the 10-6 barrier, something she easily conquered at the New Balance Indoor Championships in New York City on March 11. She cleared the bar at 11-2 1/2, a mark that ranks her second all-time in school history behind Gurganus.

"Chasing Sally is really pushing me right now," Cook said. "I really looked up to her when I was younger. She and my sister (Taylor) were great athletes and they really worked hard at the pole vault. Watching them motivated me to be a pole vaulter."

And Cook's work ethic has paid off in a huge way. It's earned her an athletic scholarship to a Division I school in ASU.

"They're getting a quality young lady," said WHS coach Randy McDonough. "She will join a great line of athletes that we've sent to ASU. It's funny, we used to be the distance-running capital of the world. But now it seems that we've become a pole-vaulting school. And all the credit goes to Daniel. He's done a great job with all of our vaulters over the years."

Gurganus, Ward, Taylor Cook, Sydney Cook and Laura Gulliver are just a few of the athletes that have greatly succeeded at the pole vault under Isaac's guidance. Gurganus alone produced five state championships during her stay with the Pioneers.

"Today is a huge reward to the girls like Sally and Julie that got us started in this event," Isaacs said. "They were the ones that all the other girls are measuring themselves up to. Sydney is a great example of that. She's worked so hard at this, and I am so excited about her going to ASU."

"I went there, and I competed there. They have a very good coaching staff, and this is a great opportunity for her."

And Cook, who will aim her sights at cracking the 12-foot barrier Saturday morning at the Taco Bell Invitational, is also a strong contender for a possible state championship next month in Greensboro (at North Carolina A&T).

"It's possible," Isaacs said. "It all depends on what happens that day. The field is very competitive. There's a girl that's all ready jumped 13 feet (Sydney White of East Forsyth did it at the East Forsyth/Parkland Duals on March 23), but you never know what's going to happen the

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day of the event. But getting over 11 feet for Sydney is nothing right now. It's coming naturally. And I expect her to keep getting better."