

And The Beat Goes On.....

Written by Mike Kelly
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Every year, the names change, but the tradition of Watauga High's success in track and cross country just keeps rolling along. Head coach Randy McDonough, who took over the cross country program in 1993 and the track program in 1994, has seen his share of state championships, state qualifiers, state place finishers, and conference titles. As a matter of

fact, conference championships have become practically automatic during his coaching tenure. And he's been blessed with a core of athletes that are deeply dedicated year in and year out. The names change, but they leave a legacy behind them. Ricky Brookshire, Olympians Brenda and Lindsey Taylor, three consecutive state titles in women's track (1995-97) and three state titles in cross country titles (women in 1995; the men in 1996 and 1999) are just a few of the accomplishments. The list is very impressive, and each and every runner, who has worn the blue and white has carved out a piece of history, adding to WHS' powerful tradition.

And on Tuesday, McDonough said good-bye to another solid core of seniors looking to further their talents at the next level. Andrew Vandenberg signed with Milligan College, an NAIA school in Johnson City, TN.; Reid Harris, who set a new school record in the men's pole vault with an effort of 15-feet, two inches, signed with UNC-Charlotte; Max Ruble, who finished in a fifth-place tie at the state meet last Saturday, will walk on at UNCC; Hailey Middlebrook will walk on at the University of Michigan, and Hannah Barbour will walk on at Wheaton College, a Division III school in Wheaton, IL (a western suburb of Chicago), and a member of the College Conference of Illinois-Wisconsin.

And that group, which closed out their careers with a strong showing at the state meet last Saturday, has had its share of post-season accolades.

"Oh yeah, I knew what I was getting into when I first got here, said Hailey Middlebrook, reflecting back on her freshman year. "I was just hoping to crack the top seven, and to make some kind of contribution. But the coaching staff here is so helpful, especially if things don't go well. Coach McDonough is so encouraging. He always has something positive to say." Middlebrook, who won the Hall of Fame Award this season (that award goes to the best female athlete at WHS) was an unselfish athlete for the Pioneers this season, running a number of events. She finished her career with an eighth-place finish in the 800-meter run at state last weekend. She was the NW3A/4A Conference champion in that event; she finished third at regionals.

Barbour was a member of WHS' 4X800 relay team that finished third at state. Barbour, who had an impressive freshman year, has battled health issues the last two years. But despite those frustrations, Barbour has been a major contributor to the program.

"Hannah has such a positive attitude," McDonough said. "Things may not go her way at a race, but she was always upbeat and the loudest person on the bus on the ride back home pumping up her teammates. That's just Hannah. It's her personality. She's such a positive person. It's a blessing to have an athlete like that. She is so unselfish. It's been great coaching her the last four years."

"I'm just doing what God has blessed me to do," Barbour said. "Being a part of this program, it's crazy that four years have flow by so fast, it's hard to put into words, but being with this program

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has really shaped me, and developed my personality. The biggest thing with me has always been the team. The friendships I've made, our love as a team for this sport, have been huge motivations for me."

Speaking of motivation, Harris had plenty to shoot for this season. And he more than achieved his goals. He broke the school record in the pole vault originally set by his mentor, Daniel Isaacs (now living and coaching women's pole vaulters in Hawaii), and he also won the Trailblazer Award (that goes to the best male athlete at WHS).

"And the fact that Daniel won it his senior year (1997), really makes it special," Harris said. "I was a football player, and the only reason I picked up track was to get faster. But on my second or third day, coach (Kevin) Shaw sent me to Daniel. I knew nothing at all about pole vaulting. But I was blessed to have a coach like Daniel. He really helped me get here. And being a part of this program means a lot to me. Obviously, without this program, there's no pole-vaulting record, there's no opportunity to keep doing this in college. To leave my name on this program makes me feel, very, very good."

"And that's the type of athletes we've had here," McDonough said. "They're always striving to do more. They're unselfish, and they're determined. Those factors have played a huge role for us over the years, and it's really fueled our success."

And the beat goes on, and on.....