

Runner Joey Stel wants to make history of his own



By Jeff Doner

Joey Stel, a 16-year-old runner from Aurora High, knows his school's cross country history includes an OFSAA gold as recently as 2007, but the grade 11 student is taking it upon himself to try and keep that tradition rolling and make some history of his own.

Recently, Joey has had some important races that have helped him get his overall time down and build his endurance for the summer season, including the Midland Legion District E Championships last weekend where he came in second.

Joey is a member of the Newmarket Huskies cross country running team and is also active in the Aurora Golden Eagles running team as both a participant and a coach.

Having played numerous sports throughout his life, Joey said running started becoming a possibility when he was in grade six. A few years later when he was in grade nine, he started getting a little more serious with the sport.

"From Grade 6 to 9 it was a cross country focus, because it was a lot cooler to me and then I really stepped it up to try and take it somewhere when I was in high school, because we had very good runners at the school when I first came in," he explained. "At the time we had some very gifted athletes at my school. The running team was very highly regarded by many in the province."

Before getting into cross country, Joey played a bevy of different sports, but he admitted that things never really clicked with the other sports.

He trains six days a week, which includes two workouts a week at Pickering College for speed training with the Huskies and up to a 16 km run every Monday. But his training doesn't stop there.

"For me to get better, I'll start at January at 12 km and work myself up to 16 km and work back down to build stamina and my endurance," he said. "I'll start working down as the speed work starts to happen with the club. Now at this point at the start of the summer, I should start getting a lot faster times when I'm doing the 12 or 13 km's now."

However, Joey was quick to admit that seeing all those cross country trophies and photos from years past in the halls at school keeps him inspired.

"My teachers would always talk about these guys who would win it all for our school," he said. "Even the Wikipedia page for our school says the biggest accomplishment for our school in sports is the cross country team that won OFSAA."

He was also quick to credit runner, Eric Macpherson, for taking him under his wing and showing him the ropes when he was a fresh-faced grade nine student testing the waters in cross country.

"He was so good to us," Joey said of Macpherson. "He would basically show us the ins and outs of every race and show things

because we were the rookies.?

So, with some words of wisdom and a solid understanding of what needed to be done to get better, Joey soon took off and went to regionals with the Huskies, which marked the first time he competed against runners outside of his school.

?The first time I went I came in eleventh and that was sort of a butt kicking, so then I stepped up with my coach and at school and did a full year and other than running, started doing core training to work other areas of the body and just get better.?

As of today, his best race is the 3,000m, but said once he gets to the university level he hopes to compete in the 5,000m race as well.

?In the 3,000 I'm at nine minutes and six seconds, right now I sit 0.4 of a second off the national standard to make nationals. So that's really close to where I need to be.?

He said he's so close to meeting his mark that he can taste it, which has been helping him forge ahead in preparation for his next challenge this week.

?This week I hope to break and beat my time and then I can make my first track nationals appearance in Langley, British Columbia,? he said.

Joey will be racing in the York Twilight, which is a race where people try to improve their personal best time. The time collected at the York Twilight can be used to qualify for nationals.

?It would be a huge step forward if I get below nine minutes and six seconds this week,? he said. ?I'll get to fly over to British Columbia again for another nationals but this time it would be for my first track and that would be on Aug. 9.?

With another trip to nationals on the radar, Joey listed his first trip to a national competition as his career highlight thus far.

?The nationals I made last November for junior cross country was probably my biggest achievement so far,? he said. ?I was selected to be on our national squad to go to the junior nationals in Vancouver, BC. I made nationals two years before I was supposed to. The minimum age is supposed to be Grade 12 and I was in Grade 10.?

Even though he said the rain failed to cease the entire time he was there, not all was lost.

?It was a great experience because we got to jump right into the ocean after the race. There were only 20 or so kids my age that got to go to nationals for junior. That was definitely my greatest achievement there. For me it was my first every national experience and flying out there with the boys was amazing.?

With a summer of races still ahead, Joey explained that keeping in shape is not the only important part to getting ready for nationals; a strict schedule is also needed to make sure he is prepared.