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Jumping Janae

Dunchack claims gold again

By Philip Cmor, pcmor@altoonamirror.com

POSTED: May 24, 2008

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SHIPPENSBURG — Janae Dunchack was down to her last attempt at 5 feet, 4 inches, and she was looking for some divine intervention.

"I just basically thought, 'OK, just calm down. You know you can make this,'" the usually unflappable Northern Cambria sophomore said. "And, 'Dear God, please help me.'"

Dunchack's prayers were answered. Even though she got the bar with the back of her leg, it stayed up, allowing her to move to the next height.

Dunchack was the only one to clear 5-5, completing the heaven-sent victory and walking away from the PIAA Track and Field Championships Friday with the gold medal in the Class AA high jump for the second year in a row.

Earlier in the day at Shippensburg University's Seth Grove Stadium, Dunchack had taken fourth in the long jump. Her distance there was 17-6.

"I was definitely a lot more calm in the beginning [than last year]," Dunchack said when asked to compare the feelings of this gold medal to last year's. "But, as it went on, I started to get really nervous, and I really felt a lot of pressure to repeat."

Dunchack looked strong in her early high jumps before running into an unexpected obstacle at 5-4 that left the cool Lady Colt sweating. She wasn't really close to converting on either of her first two attempts at the height. Meanwhile, Richland's Calsie Boyd and Bedford's Brandy Harris had already cleared it and were ready to battle at 5-5.

A determined Dunchack made her approach for her third and final attempt, and went up and over the bar, only to brush it with her calf.

The bar shook for a moment, but stayed up. Dunchack breathed a sigh of relief.

"It's usually after I land on the mat, and I'm like, 'Ew, I just hit that.' It was great [when I saw it stayed up]," Dunchack said. "I was really happy, but I knew I'd probably have to clear something else."

Still, at that point, she at least had a chance. She had made 5-8 this year at the Penns Manor Relays, a result neither of the other competitors remaining had achieved. So, she altered her speed and took a harder step on her plant foot.

"I just kind of calmed down. I knew I had three more jumps left, so I just tried some new things. I changed stuff around and just hoped for the best," Dunchack said.

It worked. When Dunchack made 5-5 on the second try, the gold was in her grasp again.

The fourth in the long jump was more of a surprise. Dunchack tried to compete in four events at last year's PIAA meet and failed to make the finals in the long. This year, she cut out the 100- and 200-meter dashes she had also won at the District 6 championships, focusing on doing something in the jumps.

"I was a lot more relaxed. I thought that if I made it into the finals this year, that would be a big step up

Article Photos



Mirror photo by Teri Enciso
 Northern Cambria sophomore Janae Dunchack clears the bar en route to her second straight PIAA Class AA gold medal in the high jump.

Fact Box

Friday's area medalists
AAA BOYS
 Sixth: Terry Bookhamer, Altoona, discus
 Seventh: Neal Huynh, Altoona, discus
AA BOYS
 Eighth: Ethan DeVore, Juniata Valley, javelin
AA GIRLS
 Gold: Janae Dunchack, N. Cambria, high jump
 Bronze: Brandy Harris, Bedford, high jump
 Fourth: Janae Dunchack, N. Cambria, long jump
 Seventh: Allie Smith, Central, high jump
 Seventh: Kaylee Adams, P-O, high jump
 Eighth: Marybeth Rocco, N. Cambria, discus
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from last year. If I didn't make it, that would be OK," Dunchack said. "It was great."

Dunchack said not trying all the events helped keep her strong. She said she got up and stretched early and paid particular focus on her first three attempts — the third was the one that got her fourth place.

She also credited NC coach Jenny Kirsch, a former state-caliber Lady Colt jumper who has just returned from Slippery Rock University.

"She really told us what to do and all the dynamics and everything. It was really fun this year," Dunchack said.

The obvious question after Friday though isn't whether she can improve again in the long jump. It is whether or not Dunchack can win the high jump four times.

"Hopefully, I'm working on it," Dunchack said with a smile.

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