

Indoor track and field heads to Birmingham

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After posting top finishes at the Panther Indoor Icebreaker in early December, the Mississippi State indoor track and field team looks to pick up where it left off in the first meet of the new year, the UAB Blazer Indoor Invitational.

At the conclusion of the 2012 NCAA Championships, a host of Bulldogs earned All-American honors. Jody-Ann Muir (400-meter dash), Marcus Jackson (high jump) and the 4x400m squad of Emanuel Meyers, Tavaris Tate, Daundre Barnaby and James Harris concluded the season with first-team All-American honors.

Nathan Arnett (400m hurdles), Barnaby (400m dash), Favian Cowards (hammer throw) and the 4x100m team of D'Angelo Cherry, Jarrett Samuels, Justin Christian and Tate all claimed second-team All-American accolades.

The men's team is ranked No. 20 for preseason indoor track and field after the 2012 season proved to be the highest SEC finish for MSU since 1989. After recruiting some outstanding athletes and a strong and demanding offseason, the Bulldogs went out to prove the 2013 season would be even better as 10 Bulldogs posted top finishes at the Panther Indoor Icebreaker.

In her first collegiate competition, freshman Megan Walker posted a top pole-vault height (12-01.50) and finished second overall. Also, freshman Brandon McBride finished first in the 400m dash with a time of 48.13.

The Canadian said he did not expect a first place finish because it was his first time competing in the States and the 400m dash is not his natural position.

"It's all new to me, so I didn't know what to expect," McBride said. "The 800m dash is my natural position, so to come first in the 400m dash is truly a blessing."

Although McBride posted a top performance in his first collegiate event, he said he has been working on improving his speed and endurance in order to be a successful dual runner.

"The 800 is my natural position, so I have to continue to increase my speed to be successful at the 400," McBride said. "I also have to increase my endurance in order to be a dual runner and compete for both the 400 and 800."

Barnaby, the senior All-American and Olympian, did not compete in the Icebreaker but said he expected his teammates to perform the way they did because they worked hard and put in the work during the offseason.

After competing in the 2012 Summer Olympics and missing qualifying for the second round of the 400m dash, Barnaby said his mindset coming into this season was to improve and get better.

"I worked on getting stronger in the weight room and building my lower-body strength to improve my time and speed," Barnaby said. "My mental strength was also a key focus."

McBride said he looks up to Barnaby and is learning as much as he can from him before Barnaby graduates.

"I'm always watching and asking him for tips about becoming a better 400m runner," McBride said. "He's a cool guy; he has Canadian citizenship, and I'm Canadian. He's an Olympian, and I plan on being an Olympian but in the 800 instead of the 400."

Sophomore Erica Bougard, who will see her first action this weekend competing in five events as a pentathlete, is also coming off an outstanding season, earning SEC All-Freshman honors in the long jump and heptathlon. Bougard did not travel to Birmingham in early December but said she spent a lot of time building her physical strength during the offseason.

"I focused on strength and conditioning and high-jumping," Bougard said. "I'm jumping twice as high as last season."

Bougard, Barnaby and McBride will all be in action this weekend at the UAB Invitational and Saturday at the Crimson Tide Indoor Opener. Both events will take place at the Birmingham Crossplex.