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# Midland's Burcham looks to set national record

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HUNTINGTON -- As Jacob Burcham stretched and warmed up around Huntington High's track last weekend, he shyly looked to his running partner, Matthew Edmunds, and quipped, "This is kind of awkward."

There he was, Burcham, Cabell Midland High School's gazelle-like runner who makes mile gallops look like walks in Ritter Park, nervously shaking his legs and hands before a sparse crowd at Hershey's West Virginia Track and Field Meet, an event he once dominated.

But now, he felt awkward.

His name was prominently announced over the Bob Sang Field public address system. The spotlight was on him.

Cue the starting gun.

Move over awkwardness, make room for natural grace.

Back in his element, Burcham lightning-paced his way around the track. Sparking by on lap one at 59 seconds, streaking into lap two at 2:05, before sizzling his way home at 3:06.

It was 1,200 meters of pure, controlled speed. More importantly, it was a mile pace of 4:10, five seconds clear of his goal for Saturday at the New Balance National High School Track and Field Championship in Greensboro, N.C.

He's trying to set the national record for a freshman in the mile, which currently stands at 4:15.

"We're just copying the training we did three weeks before Gazettes," Burcham said referring to the Charleston Gazette Relays, where he ran a 4:14.51 in the 1600, which is nine meters shorter than a true mile. "And so far, all my workouts have been faster than they were for the Gazettes so, if it works out, I should have a faster mile."

Just 15 years old, Burcham has already racked up a prep career's worth of hardware. At the state meet, he finished second in the 1600, fourth in the 800, second in the 3200 and anchored the winning 4x800 team.

Not bad for a kid who's only been running competitively for three years.

"What has me excited is this is the top freshman in the nation," said Cabell Midland track coach Chris Parsons. "And not only is he here in West Virginia, he's in Cabell County and he's on Cabell Midland.

"So that's exciting for me.

"But what I have to look at him is over a four-year span. I'm not overdoing him. We have to build him each year."

If Burcham's progression from 2009 to 2010 is any indication, Parsons might be constructing a machine-in-spikes.

As an eighth-grader, Burcham dashed his way to a national record time of 4:33 in the 1600.

Flash ahead nearly a year later and he's cut 19 seconds off that pace.

"I just do what my coaches tell me to do," Burcham said. "And it works."

Before this past track season, Burcham and Parsons sat down and discussed realistic goals. Burcham told his coach he wanted to break the school record in the 1600, which was 4:23, and threaten the 4:20 range.

He went six seconds faster.

"We never thought he'd run 4:14," Parsons said. "So that's just been icing on the cake for him."

But what about a national record?

"It'd be pretty exciting, I think," Burcham said. "Because it would actually be official.

"It'd be really cool."

Burcham will run in the championship division of the New Balance Nationals, going up against high schoolers of all classes. They are a group that should produce mile times well under 4:10.

A live stream of Burcham's shot at history can be found on <http://www.newbalancenationals.com> and <http://www.flotrack.org>. He will run at 4:10 p.m.

All information pertaining to the New Balance event can be found on <http://www.nationalscholastic.org/outdoors>.