

SportsPreviewTrack

McAfee and Prince: True friends and rivals

2 track coaches work to aid sport

By **JIM UTTER**
Staff Writer

Larry McAfee and Richard Prince are the longest-serving track coaches in Mecklenburg County.

But they are much more — friends and successful coaches who work tirelessly for whatever cause is in the best interest of their sport.

"I think we get along very well together," said McAfee. "We may disagree sometimes, but I think both of us know that whatever we may do or say, it is always in the best interest of the sport. It couldn't be any other way."

McAfee, 51, is entering his 24th season coaching boys' track at East Mecklenburg. He won his first N.C. 4A state championship last season. The title meet was at UNC Charlotte, where he attended college and ran track. McAfee has also coached four state championship boys' cross country teams and one state championship girls' team.

Prince, entering his 27th season at Myers Park, won the 1972 and



CHRISTOPHER A. RECORD/Staff

Longtime high school track coaches Larry McAfee (left) of East Mecklenburg and Richard Prince of Myers Park are expecting their teams to contend for the Southwestern 4A boys track title this season.

1980 4A boys' track titles. McAfee also serves as a USA Track & Field official and has officiated at the NCAA track and field championships, U.S. national championships and the ParaOlympics.

"Richard and I both have a lot of experience in track and field. We both competed in track. We both started coaching once we started our teaching careers," said McAfee.

Prince is a former member of the National Federation of High School Athletics rules committee for track and field and coordinates the annual Queen City Relays.

McAfee and Prince, working together, run the annual Wendy's Invitational cross country meet and serve as co-meet directors of the Footlocker Southeast Region cross country championships.

McAfee, who designed the cross country course at McAlpine Creek Park, helps run the annual high school cross country state championships there, along with Prince.

Neither coach is planning to retire from the sport anytime soon.

"I wouldn't be doing this for so long if I didn't enjoy it," said Prince. "I haven't decided anything. But right now, we have a season starting and that's what I need to deal with."

McAfee said he's had to refute rumors the past several weeks of his retirement.

"I don't know where they come from," he said. "I've told my athletes and parents that if it ever gets to the point where I'm not having fun, then it's time to step away."

"I'm certainly not at that point." McAfee's and Prince's teams are expected to contend for the Southwestern 4A boys' track title this season.

East Mecklenburg is the odds-on favorite to repeat as conference champion. East Meck features senior Darren Tuitt, 1997 state champion in the 200-meter, 4-by-200 relay and 4-by-400 relay.

Tuitt also owns the state record and fastest time in the nation in the 300-meter indoor sprint race.

Myers Park has "potential," says Prince. "We're very young. Most of our team is underclassmen. We have some strong individuals on the boys' team. On the girls' team, we have a good bit of depth."

Myers Park has three good hurdlers in Jessica Thomas, Abby Jones and Amanda Chen. The Mustangs have strong distance runners on the boys' team — Jim Martin, Charlie Love and David Morris.



Tuitt



Funderburk



Martin

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Darren Tuitt, East Mecklenburg

May be the best sprinter to ever come out of Mecklenburg County. Ranked No. 1 in the country in the indoor 300 meters (34.20), and although he's the defending state outdoor champion in the 200 meters (21.37), the 400 may end up being his best event.

Jamorya Funderburk, North Mecklenburg

One of the top five long jumpers in the country last year, which earned him All-American honors by Track and Field News. He could break the 25-foot barrier this year. His best is 24-9-3/4, but has scratched on several jumps reportedly over 25 feet.

Jim Martin, Myers Park

One of the state's best milers. He had a state leading indoor mile of 4:24.73. His personal best of 4:20.83 was run at last year's outdoor state meet at UNC Charlotte.

LaKeisha Boggan, West Mecklenburg

She has two state shot put titles, one outdoors (1997) and one indoor (1998) and has the potential to put the shot over 40 feet. Her best is 38 feet 11 inches.

Jenny Box, Country Day

One of three girls to break the 19-minute barrier in cross country. She is one of the state's best distance runners, public or private. Will try to improve on her 12:12 performance in the 3,200 meters.

Janelle Johnson, West Charlotte

Probably the best 400-meter runner in the state behind All-American Demetria Washington from Fayetteville Sanford (No. 2 in the country last year). Johnson's performances this past indoor season suggest she could challenge Washington at the state meet in May.

Brett Honeycutt



Boggan



Box



Johnson