

Nebraska Championship showcases junior high athletes

Written by Deb Egenberger

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Meet to be May 15 at Gothenburg.

The idea for a state championship track and field competition has been mulled around in the Clark family for several years.

Jim Clark said he and his brothers—all track and field fans—have been talking about a statewide competition at the middle school level for at least five years, maybe longer.

Finally, this weekend the idea comes to life right here in Gothenburg.

“I knew Iowa had huge success with a similar meet since the latter 1970s,” Clark said. “I researched how they did it and realized it’s something Gothenburg could do.”

It has taken the cooperation of a core group of track enthusiasts to pull it together and it will take a staff of 80 or more volunteers to make it happen.

“We have a lot of experience here with track and we have a great facility,” Clark said. “I know it’s something we can do and do well.”

The Nebraska Championship is not a Nebraska School Activities Association sanctioned event. Clark said as of yet, the NSAA does not recognize junior high athletics.

But since there are some higher levels of competition for junior high competitors in other sports,

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Clark said he believes the track championships could become an annual event.

More than 500 boys and girls in seventh and eighth grades will come from 53 schools from across the state.

Coaches were asked to enter their best competitors on the www.athletic.net website. From there, the top 16 performances in each of the 15 track and field events were invited to attend the championships.

Gothenburg athletes fared well among the best from across the state with 10 boys and 12 girls invited to compete.

"This is a premier event for kids this age," Clark said. "We're lucky to have that many of our own involved."

It's also a premier event for the city of Gothenburg.

"These are all junior high kids," Clark said. "They can't drive so someone has to bring them here."

Clark estimates at least 1,000 people will be in town for the meet on Saturday.

"This is a very special thing for Gothenburg," he said.

Running events include the 100, 200, 400, 800, 1600, 100 hurdles, 200 hurdles, 4x100 relay and 4x400 relay.

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All running events will be run as finals with heat comparison done by Finish Lynx timing.

Field events are high jump, pole vault, long jump, triple jump, shot and discus.

Medals will be presented to the top six finishers in each event. Additionally, an outstanding male and outstanding female athlete will be recognized.