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Athletes at Wichita State for 100th track and field championships BY JOANNA CHADWICK-The Wichita Eagle

Cessna Stadium's track was busy Thursday evening, filled with high school athletes preparing for the Kansas high school track and field championships this weekend.

On the north end of the track, a Chanute coach walked with two of his runners, talking strategy. Two lanes over, a pair of Lyons athletes practiced handing off a baton in preparation for running a relay today.

Three girls from Clay Center jogged by wearing hot pink tank tops, their school's name emblazoned across the front. Tents to shade athletes were already set up in the east stands.

The scene was similar to what has played out every May over the past three decades at Wichita State: Preparations for the state track meet, which brings thousands of competitors and fans to Wichita.

But there's an extra sense of excitement surrounding the meet this year: This is the 100th state track meet.

So after working out on the track, many athletes and their coaches walked over to the multipurpose room at Koch Arena to look at memorabilia from past track meets, dating back to the first meet in 1911. Olympians such as Wes Santee (1952), Thane Baker (1952, 1956), Ed Broxterman (1996) and Nathan Leeper (2000) spoke to several hundred in attendance.

About 3,600 athletes will compete at Cessna Stadium today and Saturday in one of the nation's largest high school track meets.

For Broxterman, who competed at Baileyville High School, it was an honor to be asked to speak.

"This is definitely one of my favorite memories of all time," Broxterman said of competing at the state meet. He still holds the Class 1A long jump record of 23 feet, set in 1992. "This is one of the better meets, even professionally. It's a great meet, a lot of people show up. All the classifications are here, so it's a bigger crowd."

That all six Kansas high school classifications compete at the same venue at the same time is the primary reason Ark Morris loves the state meet. A longtime Stanton County High track coach, Morris was part of a committee to commemorate the 100th state meet.

"I don't think there's any athletic event that even compares to our state track meet," said Morris, who has attended almost every state meet since 1949.

Morris talked to old friends, while current athletes milled around, marveling at the ultra-short shorts worn by Harold Manning in the 1936 Olympics. A bust of Wichita East's Jim Ryun was by the front

door, with large photos of Olympians set up in a semi-circle behind.

Athletes from Bern and Pittsburg Colgan took pictures under the sign commemorating the 100 years of track. A group of DeSoto High athletes stretched in the air-conditioned room before checking out the various tables.

Heavy late-afternoon rain sent some teams elsewhere, but Halstead coach Mark Meyer kept his team at Cessna Stadium because he wanted them to see the meet's history.

"I told the kids, 'You are going to this,' " Meyer said. "They all wanted to come. See, I coached Scott Huffman at Quinter. He was an Olympian (in 1996). He was a pole vaulter, held the American record.... The kids wanted to come and have an Olympic experience."

Halstead pole vaulter Dakota Becker dreams of the Olympics.

"That's what everybody wants," said Becker, a junior.

A Hutchinson High athlete marveled at the difference between the old-time wooden javelin and the new, sleek models. Broxterman was in awe of the yellow strip running through the room that marked the length of the shot put throw of 69 feet, 1 1/4 inches by Shawnee Mission South's Clint Johnson. That state record, set in 1980, still stands.

The 1911 team trophy, won by Norton High, sat on a table next to Norton's championship trophy from 1915.

The evening was also a time for reminiscing by former champions.

Jack Stanley, 76, and Eddie Allen, 77, were members of the Wichita North team that won the 1951 AA team title. When they heard about Thursday night, attending was a no-brainer — "We just had to come," Allen said.

It was the same for Riley Greenwood and his father, Jack. Both won the 120-yard hurdles, Riley in 1977 for Medicine Lodge, Jack in 1945 for Argentine High.

"He raised me as a track guy," Riley Greenwood said. "I remember running hurdles in the back yard. He always loved track."

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