

T&FN INTERVIEW

Alan Webb

by Sieg Lindstrom

High School Athlete Of The Year Alan Webb galvanized the entire U.S. sport in '01. A boy lightning rod, he grounded the frustrated energy of thousands of mile fans who had eagerly awaited the next prep sub-4:00 for so long.

Webb used ponderous talent, easy confidence, an impeccable work ethic and wise coaching to become the first high schooler to break 4:00 indoors (3:59.86). He then knocked nearly 2 seconds off Jim Ryun's 36-year-old HSR with his 3:53.43 at Pre. At the USATF Championships, he placed 5th.

Webb's feats resonated even well beyond the sport, as he made Late Night With David Letterman and was hosted at the White House by the President.

Now a frosh at Michigan, Webb caught many by surprise with his unexpected range in cross country, winning the Big 10 title and placing 11th at the NCs.

T&FN reached him in the dorm room he shares with Canadian Nathan Brannen, a fellow high school sub-4:00 performer. We asked Webb for an assessment of his AOY-earning senior season:

Webb: I couldn't have asked for a whole lot more. Well, I could, but not a whole lot. Things went pretty well for me last year. But not everything. Not everything.

Perfect Webb Wins AOY

To absolutely no one's surprise, we're sure, Alan Webb was a unanimous choice—the first since Calvin Harrison in '93—as Men's High School Athlete Of The Year for 2001. The miler supreme shared in an unprecedented four No. 1 All-America Rankings (see p. 35).

Discus recordsetter Niklas Arrhenius just edged distance star Dathan Ritzenhein for the No. 2 position.

This year's 19 vote-getters:

1. Alan Webb (South Lakes, Reston, Va)	240
2. Niklas Arrhenius (Mountain View, Orem, Ut)	201
3. Dathan Ritzenhein (Rockford, Mich)	200
4. Dwight Ruff (Camden, NJ)	146
5. Kevin Bookout (Stroud, Okla)	145
6. Dabryan Blanton (Forney, Tex)	96
7. Bershawn Jackson (Central, Miami, Fla)	59
8. Brendan Christian (Reagan, Austin, Tex)	57
9. Bobby Most (United, Laredo, Tex)	34
10. Jason Hill (Quanah, Tex)	31
11. Bennie Brazell (Westbury, Houston, Tex) 30; 12. Kelly Willie (Sterling, Houston, Tex) 23; 13. Joshua Walker (Stephenson, Stone Mountain, Ga) 14; 14. Alonzo Moore (Phoebus, Hampton, Va) 11; 15. tie, Ryan Hall (Big Bear, Big Bear City, Calif), Bobby Smith (Hopatcong, NJ) & Derrick Williams (Glen Oak, Canton, Ohio) 10; 18. Darion Powell (Lake Washington, Kirkland, Wash) 2; 19. Dan Olson (Academy, Albany, NY) 1.	

T&FN: What specifically do you mean by "not everything"?

Webb: I wanted to win USAs. That was a disappointment. It was something I wanted to do, but there were some positives in it.

T&FN: What do you feel you did end up taking out of that race?

Webb: If I had to do it again, I would have gone out a lot more aggressively in the first 100-150m, to get right up in the front of things from the start. Instead I was basically in last the whole time, even though it was a tight, tight pack, and it wasn't like I was off pace; I was right there. Because it was such a tight pack, I was only 10m off the leader the whole time, but that 10m was a long 10m because I had to go around everybody.

Plus, just the experience of going there is a big thing. It was my first one, and the first time that I've ever run rounds—that was a learning experience. That's it. It just completed the season the way we planned to and left a little bit of something to desire.

T&FN: One thing you haven't been asked about too often is relay racing. Your South Lakes squads won both the 4 x 800 and distance medley at the Penn Relays and National Scholastic. In the latter meet you crushed the High School Record for the DMR.

Webb: That had been a goal of ours for three years—at least Penn Relays had. The National title had developed throughout my senior year just because of the rivalry we had with Delray Beach and the Jeffersons. That was so much fun. Obviously, it was nice because we stepped it up on the right day; we got the better side of it.

But those guys, they beat us every other time. So it wasn't exactly totally dominated by one side or the other.

It was fun to really compete, especially to be able to go with the team and get psyched up with the guys. It was a totally different situation. I wouldn't trade any of that for the world. I wouldn't trade a USA championship for that. That was the week beforehand. I finished running the DMR and then four days later I ran my rounds for USAs.

T&FN: Did you have an active, ongoing rivalry with Delray Beach?

Webb: Yeah. It actually started indoors. We both ran at the Nike meet. We lost to them and we had definitely come in as the favorites. That was not good; we were very disappointed

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with that. Then we had a chance to redeem ourselves at Arcadia and we lost to them there.

They didn't go to Penn, and so we won Penn. Penn was really great because we had a chance to regroup as a team, really focus. Especially because Penn had been such a huge goal

for us for three years. My sophomore year we were 3rd [in the distance medley], losing to the Irish team and one other team from New York.

My junior year we were 2nd again to the Irish, so we were so determined to win that race my senior year. Not to mention that we

to one-up each other in terms of time. We both were watching each other, and then finally we met again at National Scholastic.

T&FN: *What did you take from relay racing over to your individual efforts?*

Webb: It helped put things in perspective: nobody is invincible. There are some deficits that cannot be made up. You know, we all learn that. There's always work to be done; there's always improvement that can be done.

T&FN: *Your District meet two weeks before Pre was a phenomenal effort: a 1600/400/800 triple of 4:06.74/49.29/1:49.53 within 80 minutes.*

Webb: That was really, really fun because that was my fourth time doing that triple. I did it both times my junior and senior year indoors and outdoors. Indoors it's the mile, the 500 and the 1000.

I won all three indoors my junior year, but I didn't win all three outdoors. I was 2nd in the 400 to... you might know, ['00 Athlete Of The Year] Rickey Harris. To tell you the truth, I was pissed that I lost that quarter because I thought I could win it. I still think I could have won it that day; I don't know if I could still beat him.

But when I saw him at Penn this last year when he anchored Florida's 4x4 in 44.8, I was like, "We-ell, I feel a little bit better about it." He only beat me by 3 or 4 tenths of a second; it wasn't a blowout.

T&FN: *When I first heard your splits in the District 1600, honestly, I didn't believe them... Until you ran 3:53 at Pre, needless to say.*

Webb: Those were real splits. It was 2:14/1:52. Seriously, 'cause I remember coach was like, "I want you to run 65s for the first two laps," and I came through the first lap at like 63. I felt like I was jogging. I thought, "God, how can I run any slower?" So I really started totally just walking. I am just walking the second lap, and the field was sort of pulling away from me.

They came through at 2:08—the field did—and I was at 2:14. Basically, coach said, I want you to run really, really slow for the first two laps and then just rock. But at the same time feel comfortable. The fifth 200, I ran like 26 seconds. I was like 40m behind the pack, and by the time the 200 ended I had a 10m lead on

the pack. Yeah.

It was funny because a friend of mine was there who had never seen any of my races before, who wasn't a big track person, had never really paid a whole lot of attention—he knew I was pretty good. I remember the first two laps, looking up in the stands and seeing that guy. I remember thinking, "Man, they must think I suck. They must think I'm the most overrated athlete on the planet."

T&FN: *You've had a fair amount of success already collegiately. Big 10 champ in cross country. Not bad for a frosh miler. Were you happy with the season?*

Webb: Yes and no. Because if somebody told me before the season started that I would get x place in the NCAA, I would have said, "Oh, that's OK." But because I started running faster than I thought I might have earlier in the season, I knew I had the potential to place higher at nationals. I still believe that. That's why I was a little bit disappointed.

T&FN: *It sounds like at the NCAA you were one of the ones who ended up paying the price for the fast early pace.*

Webb: Yeah, that's definitely one thing. I thought I could go out there and compete with [Jorge] Torres and even... I wanted to see what Boaz [Cheboiywo] was doing. You know? If he was around, I wouldn't have been reluctant to try to go after him. But 10,000's a long way. It was a learning experience.

T&FN: *I guess you're looking forward to the track season, and shorter distances?*

Webb: Oh-ho [laughs], definitely. Yes, for sure.

T&FN: *Did you change your training much from what you did in high school?*

Webb: Just a little more volume. The reason I was happy with doing a little more volume was, not only could I maintain the speed I could before over almost twice the distance, but I can run an even faster pace for twice as long. I came through 5K at nationals 10 seconds faster than I did at [Foot Locker] nationals for cross last year.

I know my leg speed has at least maintained. I feel really, really strong right now. I think I've improved on every category. I'm very happy with the way things are going. I'm very happy with what Ron [Warhurst] is doing with me.

T&FN: *How do you like school?*

Webb: School's OK. I'm not a big fan at the moment right now because of finals and stuff. But we'll see. I still have work to do. There's a week and a half before the semester ends.

T&FN: *Any thoughts looking back at your record-setting high school season before you begin your first collegiate track season?*

Webb: Uh, I guess I'd like to see another U.S. high school miler break 4:00 this year. I think it can be done. Not to put pressure on these guys... well, actually I'd like to put some pressure on these guys. I'm dead serious. People say, "Don't put pressure on," blah, blah, blah. Screw that; put pressure on 'em.

I want to see Bobby Lockhart and Bobby Curtis duke it out. Those guys need to rock and roll; they need to keep it going. □



Although it was his open miling that made all the headlines, Webb actually spent a lot of time as a high school senior cranking out super relay carries.

broke the record that the Irish set my sophomore year. We wanted to go out there and make sure that there was no question in anybody's mind that we won that event. Nobody could argue that; we were the fastest people that ever won at Penn.

Then Delray Beach ran really fast in the 4x8—like a second faster than we ran at Penn. So that sort of sparked us again. Penn and their State meet, I think it was, we were both trying