



P R E S S R E L E A S E

Released to: *Titan E-News & Sentinel-News*
Collins High School, Shelbyville, KY
Track & Field 6-2-25

State AAA Meet

Nine members of the Collins track and field team traveled to the University of Kentucky on May 31st to compete in the State Class AAA Meet. This is coincidentally the same number of qualifiers as last year. Seniors Grace Evans (pole vault), Emma Kendall (800), Grace Nelson (300 hurdles), and Luci Renda (4 X 400 relay), as well as juniors Sophie Bolin (3200) and Maleah Wilson (4 X 400 relay) made up the girls' team.

The girls finished 22nd out of 40 teams with 10 points. This is their second-best finish in the past 10 years, just behind the 21st place (12 points) finish of last year. Collins was also missing two of their top athletes due to injury, juniors Ziara Taylor and Sofia Leon. Taylor was the 3A indoor state champion in the triple jump and scored in that event along with the 4 X 400 relay last year outdoors. Leon scored in the 4 X 400 relay at outdoor state last year also.

This was Evans' fifth consecutive trip to state in the pole vault. She cleared 9-6 to finish fifth, which was her highest outdoor finish ever and matched her fifth-place finish at the State indoor meet. She has scored at indoor and / or outdoor state in the pole vault in each of her four years at Collins. Evans said, "I went to State with a 'Last One, Best One' mindset. My goal was to enjoy the environment of my last pole vault competition and get the best placement that I ever had. I accomplished that by finishing fifth. I will miss this sport and the people in it. I am proud of the accomplishments I have made during the past six years as a running and vaulting Titan!"



Grace Evans got her highest finish ever at the State Outdoor meet on May 31st as she finished fifth.

This was also Kendall's fifth consecutive trip to State. In eighth grade she qualified in the 3200, finishing 15th as the sweltering day took its toll. For the past three years she has scored (top eight finish) every year in the 800. This year at state she ran one of her fastest first laps (1:05) and was fourth at the bell behind Mabel George of Assumption, Olivia Holbrook of Campbell Co., and Addison Moore of Woodford Co. On the second lap, George and Holbrook stretched out their lead and battled down the final straight to run under the previous 3A State record of 2:10.14 set by Jessica Secor of Manual in 2023. George hung on to win in 2:09.42, a scant .03 ahead of Holbrook. Behind them Kendall hit the gas and passed Moore in the homestretch to record a 2:14.81 to Moore's 2:15.61. Kendall's time is the fourth best time in Collins history, only surpassed by the school record of 2:14.66 that she holds with Gabby Karas, and her time of 2:14.71 set in the regional meet at Collins last year.

Of her storied career as a Running Titan where Kendall holds more school records (15) than any other athlete in school history (in any sport), she said, "It was a fast group of 800 runners this year. It was exciting to be a part of the fastest 800 ever run at the state meet. The pace was quick from the start, and I had to use all my strength to hold on for third place." Kendall who has competed at both the indoor and outdoor state meets since middle school and holds 16 of top 20 800 times in Collins history said, "I am blessed to have a coaching staff at Collins to put me in position to qualify for state so many times and to do my best. Competing against the top runners in the state each year has prepared me well for the collegiate level."



(Photo: R. Delaney)

Emma Kendall (5) made the podium at State in the 800 for the fourth consecutive year. She finished third in the fastest girls 800 in State Meet history.

Kendall will continue her academic and running career at Murray State next year. She is one of the most consistent 800 runners in the state with a 2:16 average for her six fastest races this year with a standard deviation of less than three seconds. She went on to say, "I won the 800 state championship (she was also the National Freshman Champion in the 800 that year) as a freshman and then it was tough continuing to face so many good 800 runners over the last three years. I am looking forward to taking everything I learned at Collins and applying it and developing at Murray State."

Kendall came back to anchor Collins' 4 X 400 relay where Wilson led off and Nelson, who had just run a personal record in the 300 hurdles, was second leg, with Renda running third. On anchor, Kendall passed three athletes to give Collins a 15th place finish in 4:14.45, the sixth fastest time in history.



(Photo: R. Delaney)

Maleah Wilson hands the baton to Grace Nelson on the 4 X 400 relay at the State Meet. The Titans time of 4:14.45 was the sixth fastest in school history.



(Photo: R. Delaney)

Luci Renda runs the third leg of Collins' 4 X 400 relay at the State Meet.

On the boys' side, three seniors qualified for state, Nathan Janes (pole vault), Shia Gazaway (discus) and Chase Delaney (3200).



(Photo: R. Delaney)

Chase Delaney runs the 3200 at the State Meet. Delaney ended up with four of the top 10 and seven of the top 20 3200 times in Collins history.

Collins' Director of Track and Cross Country, George Sanderlin, said, "We are really going to miss our ten seniors. This is the most seniors that I have coached. Emma ran an outstanding 800 and came back with a terrific anchor leg on our 4 X 400 relay. Her consistency is unmatched and shows everyone that she is ready to compete at the next level. Luci and Maleah stepped up and ran great legs on the 4 X 400 relay, as did Nelson who ran a PR in the 300 hurdles in addition to her 1:02 second leg. It was great to see Evans get her highest outdoor pole vault finish ever, since she has worked so hard for it. Nathan was ranked fourth in the vault coming into State. However, he had an off day. I told him later that there is no way we are going to end the season like that. So, I will take him and a few other athletes to compete at the Adidas Outdoor Nationals meet on June 20-22."

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