

Father McGivney Catholic's Elijah Burns signs with Dakota Wesleyan for cross country/track

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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GLEN CARBON – Father McGivney Catholic boys cross country and track runner Elijah Burns has made much history for the Griffins by becoming the first runner in the school's history to compete in the IHSA Class 1A State track meet last June in Charleston.

And this past fall, he was part of the first McGivney cross country team to qualify for the IHSA state meet in Peoria.

On Thursday afternoon, Burns signed a letter of intent to attend Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, S.D. in a ceremony at the Father McGivney school chapel.

Burns will run for the Tigers, a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and the Great Plains Athletic Conference, in both cross country and track.

There's also a local connection as well: The Tigers' cross country coach, Jamen Helton, is the son of Griffins' cross country coach Jim Helton.

"I'm definitely really excited," Burns said. "I found out through coach Helton; he told me that he was moving from another college to this college, to Dakota Wesleyan, and I was definitely really interested in it. So I went and did a college visit. I was definitely really impressed, which is why I decided to sign with them. They've got a new track and field facility, a brand new facility, it's really nice. I met the team, and I'll bet they're really excited just to be a part of the program."

Being a part of a small school program to a small college program will help make Burns' transition easier.

"Definitely," Burns said. "I think that's a nice transition, especially that I went to a small grade school, coming to a small high school, and then going to a small college. I think that it's an easy transition, a real seamless transition."

Burns plans on majoring in entrepreneurial leadership, and sees himself possibly opening a restaurant in the future.

"I can possibly see myself getting my culinary degree and opening a restaurant," Burns said. "Especially in southern Illinois."

Burns also considered Concordia University in River Forest, Ill., in suburban Chicago and Johnson and Wales University in Providence, R.I., but felt that Dakota Wesleyan was the best choice for him. Running in college is a top priority for him.

"It was definitely a priority for me," Burns said. "Going to college, I felt like I wanted to run, so it was just decided."

Burns' accomplishments for the Griffins cross country and track programs are many, and they all mean much to him.

“It means a lot to me,” Burns said. “Here, we’ve had a lot of firsts for our cross country program, just in the last couple of years, and our track and field program as well. Going to sectionals for the first time, really competing. And I felt in the last two years, I felt we were competing in a way we haven’t in any other years here. It’s in all sports, especially this year, being able to go to state felt really special.”

And with such a young program such as the Griffins have had, Burns feels that the best is yet to come individually.

“Definitely,” Burns said. “I’ve still got a lot of potential, especially when it comes to running. When I transition, I think I’m not going to hit my peak for a little bit. I think it’s going to be a good process.”

Burns has a number of firsts for the McGivney athletic program, such as the first state track qualifier in the 3,200-meter run and being part of the first cross country team to qualify for the state meet. Burns is very comfortable with both sports.

“I think it’s kind of even between both,” Burns said. “I love track and field, so it’ll be interesting to see how I do this year, and see what I can bring to the track and field program at Dakota Wesleyan.”

Burns is looking at running the 3,200 run once again for the Griffins, and possibly add on a pair of relay events as well.

“I’m definitely looking at doing the 3,200 again,” Burns said, “and probably the 4 by (400 meters) and 4 by (800 meters).”

Burns is also looking to become the Prairie State Conference champion in the 3,200 after a second place finish the year before.

Burns isn’t sure about where he’ll fit in the cross country program at Dakota Wesleyan, but knows that the coach has some big plans for him.

“I’m not sure, but I’m sure Jamen’s got something in mind,” Burns said.



[Colin Feeney also contributed to this story.](#)