

SAN MATEO COUNTY SPORTS

Athlete of the Week

Mills discus hurler has some lofty ambitions



(Times Photo by Mark Costantini)

Mills High's Dan Katches

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MILLBRAE — A good discus thrower is like a twisted rubber band just before release. It's at that moment the discus thrower is coiled, every muscle stretched or contracted, every part of the body ready for the launch.

This is what Mills High's Dan Katches looked like last week when he threw the discus 180-8, tops in the Central Coast Section this season by 12 feet. It's what Katches likes to look like just before the release. It means a good toss is about ready to happen.

"I enjoy the discus," Katches said. "You can channel all your energy into one movement, and you can tell if its going to be a good toss or a bad one from the moment it leaves your hand. If it's a good toss, it gives you a super feeling."

Katches earned Times' Athlete of the Week honors. "It's important to have the technique when you're in the ring," Katches said. "The big thing is to get your hips out in front of your upper body. This way, you have torque at the end. It's like you are wound up like a rubber band. If you can do it quickly, and still keep your balance, you can throw the disc right."

"A lot of people think the discus is an arm event," said Katches. "But it's not an arm and chest event until the last part before release. The throw covers the whole body, and requires both speed and strength. The shot (which Katches also throws) is more of a muscle event. It seems you can master the shot easier than the discus. The disc is more complicated. It takes more time to do it right. It requires more finesse."

Katches started throwing the disc in seventh grade, mostly because it seemed like fun, and it appeared to be the only way to make it in track.

"I don't have much speed, and I'm not into baseball," said Katches, "so I stuck with the discus. I threw it a little in the seventh and eighth grade, but I didn't have

a coach. It was just messing around by myself. I began throwing seriously as a freshman at Mills.

"I was messed up as a freshman," said Katches. "Because I didn't have any form. I didn't get going until the end of my freshman year. There are good coaches here, however, and they straightened me out quick. I owe a lot to the coaches here. I couldn't keep going by myself and hope to improve. I've been lucky, though. There are two coaches in the throwing department here, and some schools don't have any."

Katches went to the state meet in the discus last year. But for him, it was a disappointment. After throwing the disc 181 feet twice, in an invitational meet and the regional CCS meet, he placed second in the CCS final, and performed well below his best at the state meet.

On the other hand, his shot put continually improved as the year progressed, and he wound up tossing the shot 51 feet, his best, at the CCS meet.

"I was throwing the disc well earlier in the season," Katches said. "But in the CCS meet, things just didn't go right. Maybe I peaked too early, although that's not how it really was. It was like I had trouble with my form. Something went wrong. In the shot, I've always been a slow starter, and it takes a while for me to feel comforta-

ble with the shot. But I had to be happy with my performance at the CCS in the shot put."

One of the major aspects of the discus Katches is working on this year is attitude. Because discus can be a frustrating event, a thrower must, by necessity, be able to persist in training, and work on his attitude.

"When things don't go right, you can get frustrated," Katches said. "So you try to keep working, because things are bound to work out. You have to keep the right frame of mind. You try to build a positive pattern and keep it going."

Katches' eventual goal is 200 feet. First, however, he wants to stay consistently in the 180 range, and continue to progress.

He works on building strength, and is continually studying his form in hopes of improving his distance.

In the summer, while Katches will cut down his training, he'll compete in the Junior Olympic meets and three or four all-comer meets.

"At the start, I did track for the enjoyment," said Katches. "Then it started to be fun to win. Now, it's more fun for me to throw well. It's a matter of reaching my potential."