

Gotcher hopes for better fit  
APTOS RUNNER WANTS TO IMPROVE IN 3,200  
By Mark Gomez  
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Brett Gotcher's bedroom walls are adorned with medals. A two-time Central Coast Section champion in the 3,200 meters, the Aptos senior has won his share.

But for the past year, a bloodstained sock hanged on his wall as well, serving as a reminder of the unfulfilled goal: challenging for a state title.

"I wake up every morning and that's the first thing I see," Gotcher said. "It gives me the fire I need."

Gotcher, who owns the state's second-best time in the 3,200 this season, will try to come full circle Saturday at the state track and field meet in Norwalk. Whether it's a first-place triumph, a secondary medal or middle-of-the-pack finish, Gotcher simply wants the chance to run his race -- something that was freakishly taken from him last year.

Among the favorites, Gotcher was 100 meters into the race when another runner's spikes caught on his shoe from behind. Gotcher's shoe partly came off, as though someone had given him a flat tire, but he kept running. After two of the eight laps, he kicked the shoe off and completed the race in 9:24.55 for 18th place.

"He's a tough kid," Aptos Coach Dan Gruber said. "He's going to finish what he starts. His foot was in bad shape, but he never thought about using it as an excuse or dropping out."

Gotcher is again a favorite -- one of two runners to go below 9 minutes this season -- but he's not presumptuous about his chance to win the state title. But after watching Gotcher train passionately this season, Gruber believes this year will be different.

"I would be surprised if he's not among the top three the whole race," Gruber said. "No matter how the race goes, he will be in the thick of it. I've never seen a kid so focused, so hungry. It's his last shot . . . and he's a big-race runner."

It didn't take Gotcher long to post one of the state's best times this year. At the Arcadia Invitational in April, Gotcher ran an 8:55.09 but was edged at the finish line by Billy Nelson of Taft Union (8:54.85). The winning time at last year's state meet was 9:00.49.

"It went out how we thought, and how we think it will again: pretty fast," Gotcher said. "I hope it does, because we'll know what to do and I can go out and hang with the leaders and run a fast time."

Gotcher's foot was mangled badly enough by the other runners' spikes that he has scars. People have asked if he plans to tape his shoe this year (he doesn't) and whether last year's events will affect his psyche (it won't).

“Last year was a freak incident,” Gotcher said. “It doesn't happen too often, but it happened to me. You can't worry about that kind of stuff. In the end, it can eat you up and make you scared rather than go out and be aggressive.”

Gotcher, who will attend Stanford in the fall, has looked forward to this race for 12 months. Sometimes he visualizes what might happen as he sits on his bed or in class. Every time he does, it turns out a different way.

If things go in his favor, maybe he will wash that sock.