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TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

Inspired by her late cousin, Dudley High's Jaylee Brown competes in Junior Olympics

Bryant Roche

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Dudley's Jalee Brown (center) competes in the 100 meter dash during the 3A NCHSAA State Track and Field Championships at Greensboro on May 20. Brown won with a time of 11.59 seconds.

WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

Bryant Roche

Jaylee Brown runs with a purpose.

She runs to honor her cousin Eric Turner, who died in October 2023 after suffering strokes.

Turner, a former North Carolina A&T track athlete, previously gave encouragement to Brown at a family cookout during Brown's freshman year. He told her she had promise in the sport she was just re-starting after having not done it since sixth grade at Southeastern Stokes Middle School.

Brown often trained with Turner, going to Winston-Salem State's practice track to do repeat 200-meter runs and 400s, his best event.

Turner's health was declining when Brown participated in regionals her freshman year, which she said motivated her even more. As time went on, Turner continued to send Brown inspiring messages — even while he was in the hospital — telling her to pump her arms and go ear to hip, in addition to watching her meets and keeping track of her results.

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“It meant a lot because I knew he wanted to see me succeed, and I knew he wanted to see me go far,” Brown said. “So knowing he wanted to see that for me made me want to push harder. It makes me want to achieve my goals, and mostly everything, I try to do it for him.”

This week, Brown returns to A&T, where she helped Dudley win a state championship in May, to compete in the **AAU Junior Olympic Games** in the 17- to 18-year-old division. She was scheduled to participate in the 100-meter semifinals on Thursday and the 200-meter finals on Friday. The 100-meter and the 4x100-relay finals are slated for Saturday.

Now a rising senior at Dudley, Brown got on the radar of college recruiters while a freshman at South Stokes High School. Inspired by her cousin, she finished third in the 200-meter event and fourth in the 100-meter race at the 2022 NCHSAA 1A state championships as the only girl representing South Stokes High School.

She then began receiving recruiting attention from Ivy League schools Penn and Princeton. Miami was her first Power Five offer, followed by SEC offers from Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina and Vanderbilt, as well as well as Ohio State and Central Florida.

As a sophomore at South Stokes, Brown bench-pressed 150 pounds, squatted 295 and deadlifted 315 in P.E. class. Training with James Daniels on the track, she shaped her raw running to be more technically sound, getting a faster arm swing and more explosion with higher knees and quicker feet bouncing off the ground.

At the 1A state championships, she won the 100 meters, improving the previous year's time of 12.73 seconds to a meet-record 11.86, and finished second in the 200 meters at 25.50, after having a 26.15 time the year before.

"I've definitely evolved as a runner," Brown said. "When I first started running, I didn't have running form or training experience; I was just out there running for fun. For practice, maybe I would get in some 100s (meters), some block starts. I didn't really know much about blocks at all either.

"I started training in Greensboro the very beginning of my 10th-grade year, and it really perfected my form. It's not perfect, but it has gotten way better. My arm swing is much faster and so are my legs."

Brown moved from Walnut Cove to Greensboro and transferred to Dudley for her junior year. She said it was a big change to move from South Stokes to Dudley; the former is a small-town country school of about 550 students, while the latter is a 900-plus-student urban school.

The track athlete felt she was more reserved than usual at first but said the Dudley team's welcoming culture helped with the adjustment. She mentioned fellow junior Serenitie Johnson, now a close friend and training partner, as someone who has had a significant impact on helping her mentally and physically in the transition.

Athletically, she felt nervous initially going from 1A competition to 3A.

"I definitely still wanted to win a state title, and I wanted to defend my title as a state champion in the 100 and also wanted to win the 200," Brown said. "I knew I had to work much harder going against much faster girls than I did in 1A."

This school year, Brown did daily workouts before school at 6:30 a.m. in addition to team practices with **Mid-State 3A Coach of the Year Tequille Jackson** in the afternoons at 4:30 until as late as 8 p.m. She has also begun doing cryotherapy and massage treatments and says her body training has been geared more toward explosiveness versus her previous strength-building focus.

"I know my rotary pattern and my leg swings, that has really helped," Brown said. "My leg swing wasn't as far as where it is. And then we do some arm workouts. We do a lot of explosive weight training, and I'd say (that is) the key to block starts. They definitely help me, not just with block starts but just accelerations in general."

This past school year, Brown helped Dudley win the **3A indoor state championship**, finishing third individually in the 300 meters and fourth in the 55 meters. In the **outdoor state championships**, she led Dudley to a team state title while accomplishing her goal of winning the 100 and 200, with times of 11.59 and 23.80, respectively, in addition to being on the **Panthers' first-place 4x100 and 4x200 relay teams**.

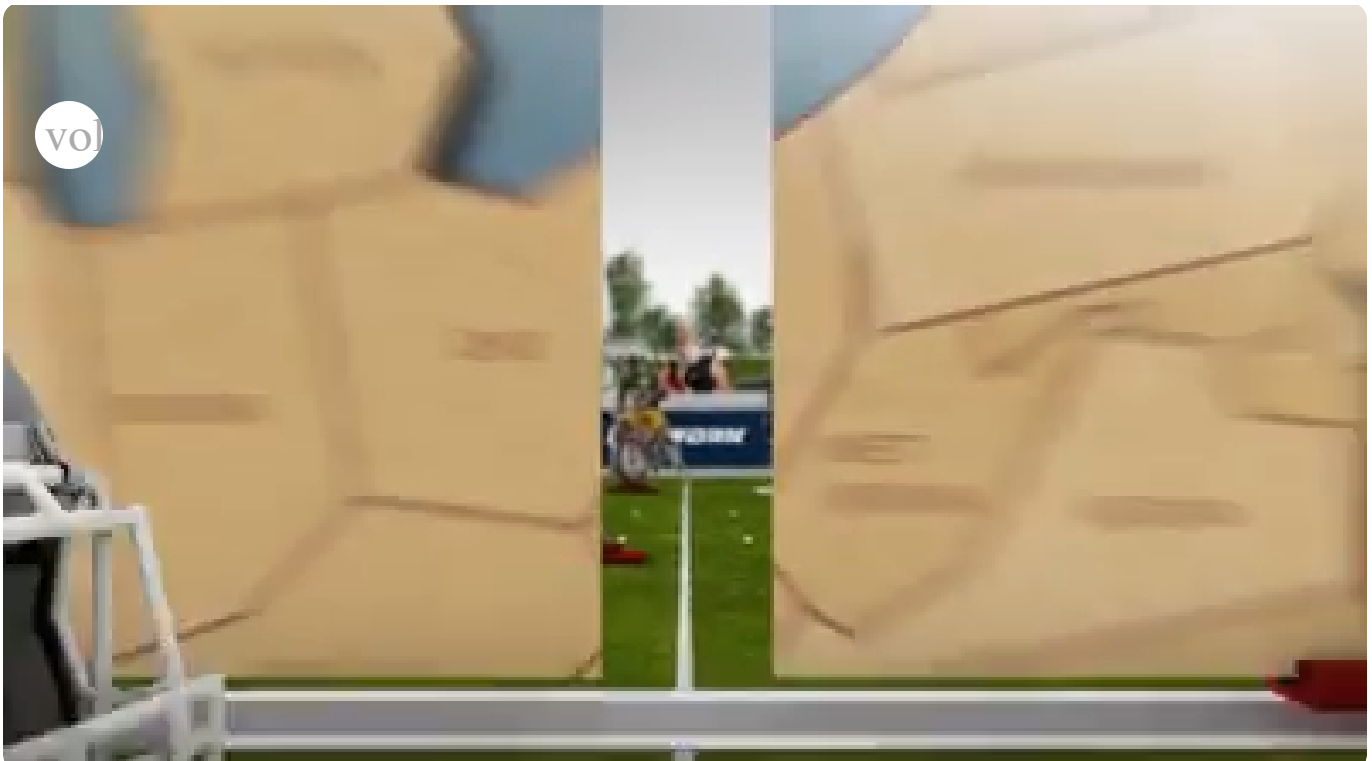
Brown's 100-meter time put her second among all Greensboro-area athletes this season, first for public schools, and third all-time among Guilford County runners. The overall effort at A&T in the state championships earned her 3A Girls Most Outstanding Performer honors.

Just after the meet, standing in the infield, she thought of Turner.

"My cousin, my first trainer, he passed," Brown said. "He is the one who introduced me back into the sport, so it was really for him too."

She is especially pumped about Saturday's relay, teaming up with **Greensboro Day's Dana Wilson**, Dudley teammate Nilijah Darden and Rolesville's Joslyn Hamilton.

"I'm definitely excited for my relay because we are trying to break a national record," Brown said.



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By Bryant Roche

High School Sports Reporter
