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PREP NOTEBOOK: ACA's Mills determined in comeback

By Andrew Carroll
Sports Writer

Rachel Mills describes herself as hard-headed, an attitude that helped her overcome devastating injuries and resume her athletic career.

Mills, an eighth-grader at American Christian Academy, qualified for the AHSAA Class 1A track meet in the 800-, 1,660- and 3,200-meter races and the 4x800 relay. She'll participate in the state meet on Thursday and Friday at Heardmont Park in Birmingham.

Mills won the state championship in the 3,200 meters in 2005. About a month later she was in a hospital in Meridian, Miss., with cuts to her leg and elbow, fractures in her back and a punctured lung.

Mills and her mother, Rebecca Mills, were driving to a basketball camp in Texas on June 8. They were traveling on the interstate when her mother swerved to avoid hitting another vehicle.

Mills said she learned a hard lesson about not wearing her seat belt.

"This white car pulled out in front of us, and my mom couldn't do anything else but jerk really hard to the left," she said. "It caused us to hit the potholes in the ground where they had put in cement or whatever. We hit that and we flipped eight times, but I had come out in the middle of it through the windshield. The glass had already been broken, so the glass cut me on my [left] inner thigh."

Mills, who said she had to teach herself to walk, didn't participate in cross country in the fall, but she was cleared to play basketball.

"I could have given up," she said. "My back caused me a lot of hard work. I had to pretty much learn how to walk again because it was pushing me over. I had to learn how to sit up. I had to practice getting out of my bed and walking down the hall. When I could barely start walking again, I got to go home. I had to stay in the hospital for five days.

"At first I was scared, like right when it happened. When I hit the concrete, everything was rushing through my head. I probably could have been paralyzed or anything, so I was thinking about my future, about track and if I was going to get to run again. But I'm pretty hard-headed. I'm very determined to get things done.

"My mother was always there for me. She was always helping me out because I had to have my bandage rewrapped every day. While I was still hurt, she helped me get in the shower and stuff."

Mills' determination was evident last Friday in the Section 3 meet at Cullman. She won the 800, 1,600 and 3,200 races to qualify for the state meet. Mills qualified in the 4x800 relay as she teamed up with Elizabeth Tiller, Katelyn Stewart and Sara Gibson placed second.

Mills placed second in the 1,600 and third in the 800 in the 2005 state meet.

She said her faith kept her going through the rehabilitation of her injuries and the training she had to endure.

"Mainly, it was God being there for me," she said. "He's given me all this ability, and I need to use it for Him. Being how I am, I have to finish and push it really hard at the end."

Andrew Carroll's high school notebook appears every Wednesday. He can be reached at andrew.carroll@tuscaloosaneews.com or at (205) 722-0223
