

Student of the game

Flathead's Zink sees familiar faces all around his favorite event

By FRITZ NEIGHBOR

Daily Inter Lake

Dylan Zink can look at the rankings on athletic.net and see all the talented triple jumpers on this side of the Continental Divide.

Or he can just look down the runway at Glacier's Tate Kauffman.

"I think it's a really interesting dynamic," said Zink, the 1B to Kauffman's 1A.

"We get along super well, and I really like that the top two triple jumpers in AA are from the same town.

"And if you look at the rankings, five of the top 10 in AA are from this valley."

Zink will face another standout in his signature event today in Whitefish's Gabe Menicke — Flathead and Browning are in Whitefish for a triangular — and that's the way he likes it.

The more the merrier. "We have a kid, Odin Erickson, who only joined track this year," Zink said. "Archie Roe was his second meet doing triple jump, and he was a half-inch off qualifying for State. It's been interesting watching his progress." Here's how Zink has progressed:



FLATHEAD'S DYLAN ZINK competes in the triple jump during a crosstown track and field meet at Glacier High School on Tuesday, April 19. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

His first triple jump, in 2021, measured 38 feet, 8 inches. He got to 42-2 at Divisionals, and took fourth at the State AA meet at 41-6 ½.

This year he broke 43 feet in his first meet of the season, and then at the crosstown dual — maybe because it was the crosstown dual — he set his personal record of 43-11 the same day Kauffman went 44-7.

Those marks remain 1B and 1A.

Zink credits veteran Flathead head coach Dan Hodge and jumps coach Reed Watkins for his success. Hodge feels the credit goes to the hard work he put in.

“I know he was out for track and liked to work,” Hodge said. “You give him a target and he would jump on it, right now. He wants to be the best.

“I think most of his success is not from his ability, but most of it is from working hard.” Zink has a half-brother, Joel, who was a good enough triple jumper in Colorado to land a scholarship. The Flathead senior is hoping to push his PR to 44-6, which is the threshold the University of Montana has for recruiting.

“I’ve been super consistent, and had some good PRs,” said the senior, who’s eyeing a law career like his brother. “I feel like I had a lot of really good marks, all senior season.” The event is filled with athletes that are relative newcomers. Flathead sophomore Carter Bullins sits fifth in AA. Erickson sits ninth.

“It’s just a really funny event,” Zink says. “It’s one you have to figure out — one you have to improve at, every day.”

Hodge loves coaching Zink, who was responsible for four of Flathead’s five points at last year’s State AA meet. He showed up at every offseason plyometric workout; he’s spent ample time with the Highlander youth track program.

“I don’t know what he has going on, but those kids like him and look up to him,” Hodge said. “I don’t know if it’s his approach or if he’s a good story teller or what, but the kids really like him. My fourth-grade grandson thinks he’s the greatest.”

Zink has affection for Hodge as well. “Fifty years of coaching,” Zink said. “Pretty cool to be a part of four of those 50 years.” He notes that Flathead has a long history of triple jumpers: He looked up to Seth Moon, who had a strong senior campaign in 2019. He’s well aware that the Braves’ Matt Tokarz set the all-class record (48-9 1/2) in 2013.

A student of the game, Zink has three high school meets left.

“He’s one of those kids you love to have around,” Hodge said. “He’s, ‘Yes, sir. No, sir.’ He’s a winner, in my eyes. He’s a definite winner.”