

PROFILE



Mike Austin's running was one of the few bright spots in Gresham's state playoff loss to Lakeridge last year.



Catching Melvin Renfro isn't the only problem opposing defenders have.

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could cut back. I cut back and, bang, I coughed up the football, and Melvin and Eischen were on top of it. I was quite upset."

But the main competition between the two has come on the track, where their friendly rivalry dates back to eighth grade. It grew to a head a year ago at the Wilco district meet when Austin won the long jump and Renfro placed second. Then at state Renfro came on strong and wound up second, while Austin missed the finals.

This year it was a case of reverse *deja vu*. A sky-high Renfro jumped 23-2 at the district meet to outdistance Austin's 22-9½. Then at state, Austin went crazy, jumping 23-3¼ on his final effort to win the event. Renfro went 22-9¾ for third.

"That is kind of weird," says Renfro, in reference to the turnaround. "I never thought of that. That's the way it goes."

Austin has thought of it. "I've been thinking I'd lose district on purpose next year."

But first comes football. Coming off big seasons last year, both Renfro and Austin know a lot is expected of them this fall. That's nothing new to Austin, who played on the Gresham varsity as a sophomore and was the Gophers' workhorse in 1980. But no one really knew what to expect from Renfro last year. The most anyone knew about him in relation to football was that he had a famous father. So he must be good. But as a sophomore, Renfro was playing the other kind of football.

"At the start of the season I didn't have that good of skills in soccer," Renfro says. "And at the end I'd only gotten a little better. I figured, hey, if I'm going to do anything, I'm going to do what I do best."

What Renfro did best last year was run with the football. Against Putnam, he ran for 260 yards on offense and intercepted a pass on defense. "He ripped Putnam's faces off,"

hypes Austin.

But even with his success, Renfro still wasn't completely sure of himself on a football field. "Last year I really didn't know what was going on," he says. "I didn't realize what the game was like the first half of the season. I'm excited for this year. Now I know what's going on."

This year he plans to spend more time working on his defensive play, which should come as bad news for his friend, Austin, who takes enough abuse from his own teammates.

Austin rushed for 1,100 yards in 11 games last year, a figure that belies the fact he doesn't have the body to be carry on that way. At 5-9, 155, Austin isn't exactly a power runner, and he's not inclined to become one by pumping iron. "Weights hurt," he says. But show him a hole and say goodbye. He has sprinter's speed, turning in one of the league's fastest 100-meter times last spring, and good balance. If he had a weakness last year, it was an early case of fumbleitis, an affliction he hopes he has cured.

"People on the sidelines didn't like me too much," he says. "The parents holding the yard markers were telling me, 'Hey, I'll give you a steak dinner if you don't fumble this game.' Nice."

Now that football season is under way, Austin and Renfro don't see much of each other. They'll see a lot of each other on the last day of the season when they meet in what could end up being the Wilco League championship game. And they'll both have plenty to say.

"Whenever we talk it's usually about athletics," Renfro says. "It's kind of fun. I just like to have a good time."

Says Austin: "That Melvin's a mellow dude."

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