

**Prep Spotlight**

# Upward bound: Smith signs with ASU

By DAVID BULLA  
Chronicle Sports Editor

RALEIGH — That Phillip Smith was even participating in the state high school track and field championships last Friday night is a testimony to his character.

That he anchored Glenn's gold medal-winning 4x200 relay team, helping the Bobcats to their first-ever state championship, attests to his athletic ability.

As recently as his ninth-grade year, Smith foresaw a career in basketball. He arrived at Atkins 9-10 High School with a nice set shot that enabled him to make the varsity basketball team.

"Four ninth-graders made the team that year," Smith said. "They hadn't had that many ninth-graders make the team in 10 years or so. Jeff Denny was one of the four."

"We had a good team, with Jeff, Kenny Mickens and Chris Christmas. We tied Carver for the conference championship."

While Denny's basketball career flourished at North Forsyth and earned him a scholarship to the University of North Carolina, Smith has since given up basketball.

"Basketball just didn't work out for me," said Smith, who was a 5-foot-6, 135-pound guard at Atkins. "The transition from Atkins to Glenn wasn't very smooth. Most of the guys here went to Hill. Only Connell Surles and I came from Atkins."

"I wasn't familiar with the tradition. Well, this is a new school and we didn't have much of a tradition yet. If I had gone to East, I might have stuck with basketball because I was familiar with Coach (Ken) Hayes and I knew what to expect with him."

So Smith turned his attention to weightlifting and gradually began to make his once-skinny frame into a powerful body. At the same time, he decided to cast his lot with track and football. Pursuing that combination turned Smith into one of the best 400-meter men in the state.

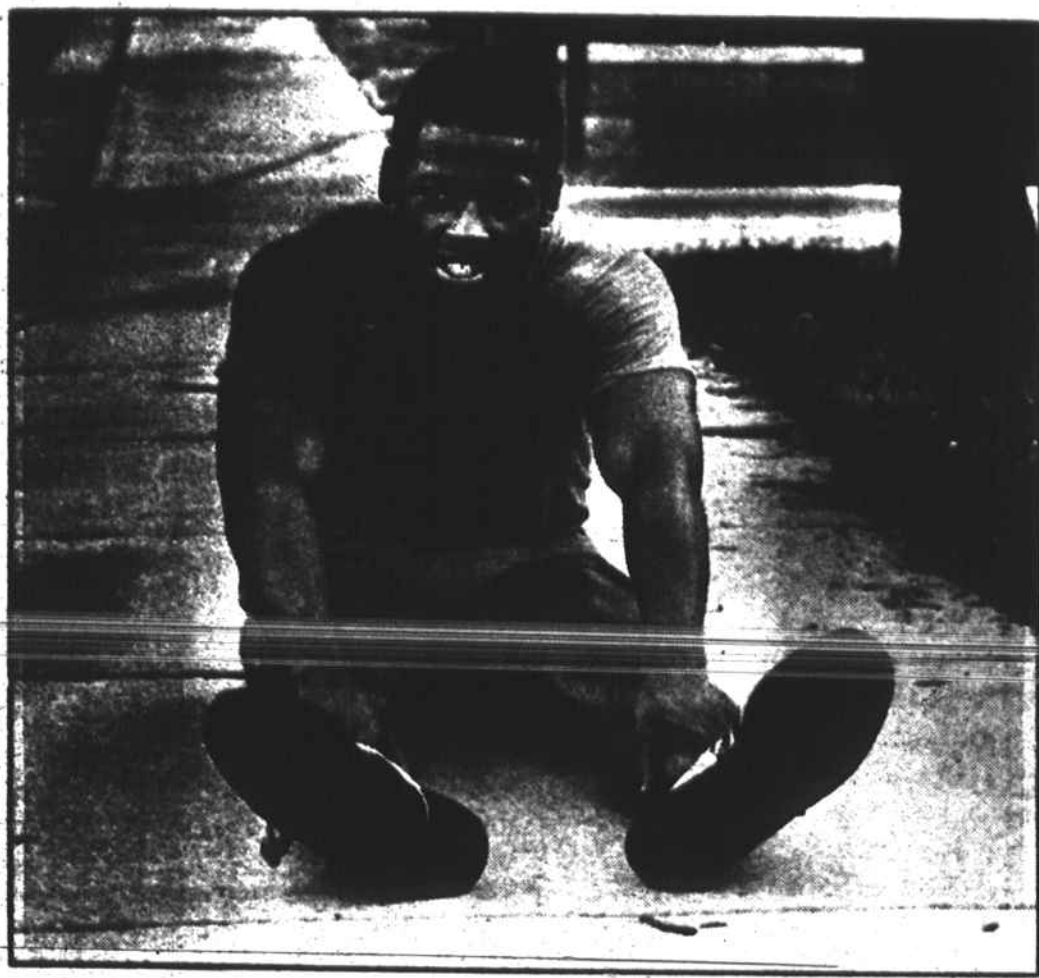
"Phillip is a power runner," Glenn Coach Steve Whicker said. "He has a good upper body, which is what you are looking for in a quarter-miler."

Smith, who finished third in the 400 in last week's state meet at North Carolina State, found track to be sweet stuff after a soured basketball career.

"I knew I had a little speed," he said. "I really didn't expect much from track. But I really like this sport. Nobody can blame you if you lose and nobody else can take the credit if you win."

Smith began his track career as a hurdler, but Whicker decided to move him to the 400 last year.

"I was looking for a quarter-miler, and he had the strength and drive," Whicker said. "I didn't put him in the open quarter right away. He anchored the 4x400 about the fourth meet



## The Right Path

Glenn's Phillip Smith stretches before a recent practice at Winston-Salem State; the quarter-miler helped the Bobcats to the state track championship last week (photo by James Parker).

of the season and we were in the middle of the pack when he took the baton. He took the lead on the backstretch and took it on home."

The next week Smith ran the open quarter in 52 seconds. He followed that with a 50 flat.

"Phillip is consistent," Whicker added. "He knocked that down to 49 to start this season, and he's been running under 49 ever since. In the regionals, he knocked his time down to a personal-best 48.4."

"As a recruiter, you like quarter-milers. You know they can go up to 800 and 1,600 or down to 100 and 200, depending on what type of runner they are. You also like to see someone who's awfully consistent like Phillip. You know you can rely on him for leadership."

Because he started running the 400 so late in his prep career, few recruiters were interested in him when the season started. But Appalachian State, which has won three straight Southern Conference championships, discovered the Bobcat sprinter. Last week the Mountaineers signed him to a scholarship.

"Coach (Robert) Pollock told me that he's losing a few quarter-milers," said Whicker, a former all-America half- and quarter-miler at ASU. "So he envisions Phillip helping right away."

Smith, who has an interest in criminal justice and political science, had already been interested in Appalachian State, where his brother Tyrone is enrolled. So much so that he applied there after taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and the university accepted his application.

Last year, however, Smith didn't pass two major tests: the NCHSAA Regionals and the

TAC Regionals. He just missed showing well enough in those meets to advance to the NCHSAA state meet and the TAC nationals, respectively.

Over the summer he enrolled in the Upward Bound program at Winston-Salem State and ran competitively for the Roadrunners track club.

"I wasn't really prepared last year," Smith said. "But there's no doubt in my mind I should have been in Seattle."

"Maybe I wasn't prepared because I was too busy. People told me I was doing too much stuff. But you have to do the things that make you happy."

Smith and his Glenn teammates worked long and hard to improve on last year.

"Some guys who could have benefited the team didn't come out last year," Smith said. "We were hungry this year and got some more guys out for the team. With this state championship, there should be even more guys out next year."

Whicker knows that it takes athletes like Smith to capture state championships.

"He has a whole lot of leadership, a lot of self-discipline," Whicker said. "He also has a lot of pride in himself."

"You have to have that in track because you are out there by yourself."

You also have to have talent and Smith showed he is among the best when he anchored the winning 4x200. When Smith took the baton, Glenn was in fourth place. It didn't take Smith long to take the lead, moving ahead on the curve at the east end of the N.C. State track. He brought the baton home in 1:26.44, a half-second faster than second-place West Forsyth.

## Prep Track

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everything I asked of them. You know, I'm still on cloud nine, but I hate to see them go. I couldn't have had a better six years with them."

Phifer also coached Doggett, Ferguson and Stephanie Jessup at Lincoln Junior High before going to Dudley.

"It's time for them to go, though," he added. "It wouldn't be fair for them to continue competing at this level."

### Prep Poop

• West's Whitten has signed with Georgia Tech, where she'll run the 5,000, 10,000 and cross country for Coach Dee Wood. Whitten, the Chronicle's Female Athlete of the Year for 1985, was an all-America in cross country, the only one from North Carolina last year. She also was named the NCHSAA's top



Tomika Whitten

distance runner and West's female Athlete of the Year as a junior and senior ....

• West boys sprinter Russell Tanner, a junior, has used up his

eligibility. Tanner, who finished fourth in the 100 last Friday, is being recruited by St. Augustine's and Hampton University, who cannot enroll him until the fall of 1987 ....

• West girls hurdler Sonya Love has enrolled at Alabama A&M, where she will try to make the track and field team as a walk-on ....

• Dudley sprinter Stephanie Jessup has narrowed her list to Howard and North Carolina A&T ....

• Remember the name Mike Clinebell. The Watauga County distance runner set a state record (9:08.00) in the 3,200 meters, winning by almost 10 seconds. He looks like a future contestant for a national championship and perhaps a berth on the U.S. Olympic team.

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