Kyle Carper and Marissa Smith, both juniors at HHS, aimed for the gold and found double success at the 2A State Track & Field Championships at JeffCo Stadium in Lakewood May 14-16.

Carper won the long jump and triple jump, while Smith took first in both the 200 and 400 meter races.

Dragon fans have yet another year to enjoy the HHS success of these two fine track and field athletes, as they will be seniors next year.

Carper repeats as State Champ

Carper recorded 21' 7.25" to win the long jump event, a feat he also accomplished last year. In the triple jump, he not only bettered his 2008 second-place state finish, but he outdid his personal best by 16.75 inches, jumping 44' 11.75". As a freshman, Carper took fifth in the triple jump.

Winning both events was Carper's goal, and he feels is his greatest accomplishment at state. He would like to improve his state performance in the long jump, as this year's state mark was 7.75 inches short of his personal best.

Timing of events was not necessarily in Carper's best interest, but he made the best of it, and came through with not only his two golds, but a third-place medal in the 400 and a fifth in the 200.

He requested to move to the first flight instead of second for his three prelim efforts in the long jump Thursday, in order to get those in before the prelims of his 400 meter dash.

Carper said his coaches encouraged him not to push himself in the 400, but just do well enough to make the finals, then push it hard the next day. That indeed was his mindset, but the adrenaline kicked in, and Carper ended up running well. He clocked a personal best in the finals with a :51.01 for third place.

After the 400 prelims, he returned to the long jump pit for his three jumps in the finals. His longest jump was his last one, but his second-to-last leap was a beauty. Unfortunately it wasn't measured, as he scratched by probably less than an inch.

No time to rest, however, as Carper then moved back to the track for the 200 meter prelims. He bettered his personal bests in both the prelims and later the finals, running a :23.03 for fifth place on Friday.

When field events were running a couple of hours late Friday, Carper ended up having to run his 200 finals before he got to compete in the triple jump. When he returned to the pits, he was not allowed a run-through, and he was behind the board by over a foot for his first jump.

Coach Sandra Rahe noted Carper kept a level head and had a good second jump around 41-42 feet, which was good enough to make the finals. "But he wasn't happy about the distance," she added. "He wanted more."

Rahe said before his third jump, she and coach Tracy Trumper just told him to relax, move up his mark a little and go for it. Standing 20 feet away, at the fence, the coaches could tell Carper had a huge jump. "We, of course, were screaming before they even read the mark of 44' 1.75". Even Kyle showed a little emotion," added Rahe.

This was Carper's first experience of juggling the track and field event timing, as he previously has competed in only field events at the state meet.

He laughs now when he says he told everyone he would never run a 400. It was the event he was most nervous for at state, "because it's not a fun race to run," he admits.

Nevertheless, Carper found success on the track, qualifying and performing well in both the 200 and 400.

Smith climbs to top of the podium—twice

Smith is no stranger to the state track either, having placed in both the 400 and 200 all three years. As a freshman, she finished second and third, respectively, in the two races, while last year she ranked third in the 400 and eighth in the 200.

Keeping her eye on a state gold ever since she started winning track and field races at Elementary School field days, Smith was doubly elated to earn two this year. Acknowledging a state gold medal is the ultimate high school goal, Smith was quick to say, "I'm blessed. I got two."

Believing her chance at a gold was in the 400, Smith reassessed her goal after winning the 200 Friday afternoon. She made it a double effort when she won the 400 meter finals Saturday.

Noting she gets very nervous, Smith said she was especially nervous before the 400 finals, as she wanted to win so badly. She said she kept focusing on what her friend Ryan Baumgartner says, "Use your nerves in a good way."

It must have worked. In the 400, Smith ran a personal best in the prelims Thursday and even better in the finals, clocking a :58.46. Her personal best was set at :26.13 in the 200 prelims, and she achieved the same time in the finals.

Coach Rahe noted it was exciting to see Smith win both the 200 and 400-meter races by such a wide margin. "No need to see the photo finish on those," she added.

Smith said she would have liked the chance to run the 100, in which she placed third at state

as a freshman. However, she respects her coaches and realizes the significance of being part of successful relays.

Smith earned two more medals last weekend, as the anchor on the second-place 4x200 relay and the fourth-place 4x100 relay. In previous years, she medaled with the 4x100, taking fourth in 2007 and second last year.

Every time she heads to state, Smith said her goal is to place third or better. But now that she's won the 200 and 400, she admits she would like to stay on top of the awards podium.

More photos, story inside

As a team, the Dragons fared well at the 2A State Track Meet, finishing fourth in the girls' standings and a tie for seventh in boys.

A full story on the team success can be found on page 9 of this week's Enterprise, accompanied by additional photos from the May 14-16 state event.