

**HIGH-SCHOOL**

# After questioning her talent, UNC recruit finds validation with NCISAA track titles

**Joe L Hughes II** The Gaston Gazette

Published 6:02 a.m. ET May 25, 2022

As it was a recurring theme throughout her track and field career, McKynzie Mauney wasn't overly surprised her 2022 season got off to a slow start. The Gaston Day standout concedes this instance was far different, though, eager to validate her standing as one of North Carolina's top athletes.

"Usually my year throwing starts a bit slow, and I progress as the season goes into the summer," she said. "But this year when I didn't start the greatest, it felt like my performance went downhill and it was hard for me. It really made me question how good I really was? Am I good enough to be going where I'm going?"

While it took a little time, Mauney's athletic gifts revealed themselves.

A University of North Carolina track and field recruit, Mauney capped her high school career with NCISAA Division III state titles in the discus and shot put. At Saturday's state meet, Mauney set personal records with tosses of 151 feet, 10 inches in the discus and 45-9 in the shot put.

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For Mauney, it was the perfect end to a stressful week.

"Luckily I didn't have to take any exams. My grades were good enough to opt out. So I was kind of lucky not to have that stress," she said. "But looking forward to graduation and focusing on states, this has been one of the most stressful week's I've ever had. There was

planning for a graduation party, practicing every day, making sure to lift and then prepare for states? It was a lot going on, but we found the balance to make it work.”

Mauney qualified for the NCHSAA state 3A meet as a freshman at Hunter Huss. She claims that event set the stage for the rest of her high school career.

“I’ve definitely seen my skills progress a lot (since 2019),” she said. “I actually set a personal record at 121 feet (in the discus throw event). I also saw the winner throw 140 (feet) and I said ‘Man, I can only imagine throwing that.’

“Then I threw 140 feet (in the summer of 2020) and then 150 feet as a junior last year. I was reaching for that certain goal, and then to surpass it let me know I was truly on to something.”

She was also pushed to perfect her craft on a daily basis. Nipping at her heels throughout the 2022 season was teammate Camryn Massey, who last summer set a NCHSAA 3A state meet record in the discus throw (140 feet, 9 inches) at Ashbrook.

“The two of us have been competing against each since we were 13 and 14 years old in AAU,” she said of Massey, who finished second to Mauney in the discus and shot put events.

“During COVID, I found a new coach and she was looking for one, so I sent her my coach’s information. We’re throwing many of the same events and have such a competitive spirit, so we’re often the other’s biggest supporter.”

Mauney signed a letter of intent to UNC during the early signing period in December.

“UNC really gave me the feeling of being at home, a home away from home,” she said. “It was a tough decision, and I loved Vanderbilt because of the coach. But I loved UNC because of the coaching I would receive and the school.

“If I got hurt or track was taken away from me for some reason, would I still enjoy the school? Not to bash Vanderbilt, but I don’t think I would enjoy it as much as UNC. There are people I know (at UNC) already, and athletics is great across the board. There are so many things outside of my sport I can enjoy.”

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Most importantly, she's able to pen her own chapter in the Mauney family's legacy in athletics.

Her brother Marcus is currently a defensive lineman on the Yale football team, while father Tony played defensive back for Clemson in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their cousin, also named Marcus Mauney, starred at Shelby High before playing college football at West Virginia in the early 1970s.

“At some point, it got to where I was being compared to (brother Marcus),” she said. “It added some pressure, but such mentions made me feel I was destined for greatness. My brother followed in our dad’s footsteps, but I found my own niche. I’m proud to be a Mauney, and love carrying our family legacy on.”

*You can reach Joe Hughes at 704-914-8138, email [jhughes@gastongazette.com](mailto:jhughes@gastongazette.com) and follow on Twitter @JoeLHughesII.*

