

The New Face of Track and Field

February 26, 2016

Israel Nelson, the fifth fastest 60-meter hurdler in the world still misses home sometimes. The Port St. Lucie, Florida native would trade the erratic weather of Oklahoma for sunny South Florida any day of the week. Rest assured, even if he was home, he would still be running or maybe even taking some time to go fishing.

Nelson is a preacher's kid, so his story of winding up at ORU is similar to many others within the student body. His older sister lured him to ORU despite being recruited by the University of South Florida, Mississippi State and track and field powerhouse Louisiana State University.

Nelson grew up in a Christian family. His strong family structure growing up molded him into the person he has become and provided the support needed to become an elite athlete.

Nelson started running when he was 10 years old. He was encouraged to "just give it a try," and then everyone realized how good he really was.

His height (6'2") and long-legged frame coupled with his extraordinary speed made him a versatile weapon on the gridiron, but it was on the track surrounding the football field where he found his true calling.

Nelson's event is the 60-meter hurdles. Nelson has won the event every single time this season with the exceptions being the Bob Timmons Challenge and a second place finish at the Arkansas Invitational. Only three times has Nelson run anything but the 60-meter hurdles this season, and those were relays where ORU finished in the top three.

The talent Israel has is a God-given gift, but it has also taken a lot of work. "You have to run even when you're tired; you have to push yourself. Even when you don't want to run, you gotta run," Nelson said.

His two hour daily workout regimen is full of sprints and sometimes hurdles. While he is almost always physically exhausted, he believes that the mind-set of a runner is the catalyst for success.

"It's a big mind-set, because you can quit if you don't want to," said Nelson. "But if you want to see your goal you just have to put your mind to it."

In athletics, there is only so much that a person can physically do, and Nelson is giving credit where credit is due.

"I look to God when I run," he said. "Every time I run, I pray. I look toward Heaven instead of my own abilities."

Nelson is seeing his faithfulness come to fruition. The ORU track and field team traveled to Pittsburg, Kansas to participate in the Pittsburg State Invitational on Jan. 29. Nelson ran in the 60-meter hurdles.

"It was a normal day. I just had a really, really good start and just finished the race," Nelson said.

He finished the 60-meter hurdles in 7.69 seconds, which equated to the fifth fastest time in the world. The celebration only lasted for about an hour before he began thinking about the next race.

Nelson has the ability to win a conference championship, national championship and possibly even make the Olympic team.

All of these accomplishments would be tremendous, but ultimately he wants to inspire others and use his platform to share his testimony.