

Windber's Clement gets full ride to Oklahoma

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Speed is only part of the tale of Tony Clement's rapid rise in the sport of track and field.

"If you work hard enough, you can accomplish anything. That's the Tony Clement story," Hagerstown (Md.) Community College track coach Andy Reid said.

Clement, an HCC sophomore and a three-time NJCAA All-American for the Hawks, will sign a letter of intent to continue his career at the University of Oklahoma. The Windber Area High School graduate chose the Sooners' Division I full-ride offer over ones from Pittsburgh, Eastern Kentucky and Shippensburg.

"Oklahoma has exactly what I want to do academically (major in public relations, minor in religious studies) and has the program to take me where I want to go athletically," Clement said.

Where he can still go athletically is anyone's guess. Clement came from relatively nowhere before setting the track on fire at HCC. He's twice placed third in the mile at the national indoor track championships and fourth in the 1,500 at the national outdoor meet last spring. His personal-best time of 4:10.56 in the mile is an HCC record.

"Hagerstown's been a really great stepping stone, an amazing one," Clement said.

At Windber, Clement was a football player. He didn't run his first distance race until late in the spring of his senior year. A few weeks later, he placed eighth in the 1,600 at the PIAA Class AA state championships in 4:28.92.

"It's really strange," he said. "I just feel really blessed that all this has happened in such a short period of time."

Clement has made it happen.

"Tony came from a small town in western Pennsylvania. He ran 4:28 in high school - good, but not great - and has worked his way to the top of the heap, athletically and academically," Reid said. "He's the leader of our team. Everyone else feeds off him because he works so hard and always has a positive attitude.

"He's a rare kid. He says, 'Yes, Sir,' and 'No, Sir,' and 'Yes, Ma'am,' and 'No, Ma'am.' How many kids today do you hear doing that?"

Clement was recruited by Oklahoma coach Martin Smith, who's regarded as one of the best track and cross country coaches in the nation. Before joining the Sooners in 2005,

Smith coached at Oregon, Wisconsin, Virginia and George Mason and won five NCAA national team titles.

“He was really persistent,” Clement said. “He has an outstanding team down there. I’m just going to go there and put everything into it, just like I did here at Hagerstown. I just want to do the best I can and keep progressing.”

Clement has helped the progress of HCC's entire track program.

“We’ve actually signed kids because they say they want to be like Tony Clement,” Reid said. “He’s helped our recruiting. That’s how good a kid he is.”