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## Syracuse football commit's dashing speed on full display at Westhill track invite (77 photos)

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Christian Brothers Academy sprinters compete at the annual Westhill Spring Break Invitational on Tuesday, April 15, 2025, at Westhill High School in Syracuse, N.Y. (Lia Garnes | Contributing Photographer) Lia Garnes



By [Julianna Schwindt](#) | [Contributing Writer](#)

Syracuse, N.Y. — [Darien Williams](#) began running track after his freshman year of football at Christian Brothers Academy.

It was just a way to stay in shape during the offseason.

Now, the senior is one of the top runners in Section III. He proved that with his first-place finish in the 100-meter dash on Tuesday at Westhill's annual spring break invitational.

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Last season, he finished first overall in the section in the 200-meter dash and second overall in the section in the 100-meter dash.

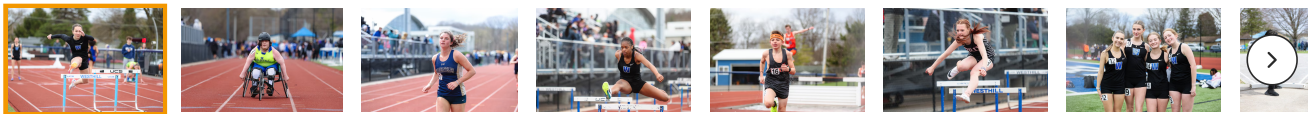
He's a three-star wide receiver commit for Syracuse football and ranked a top-75 wide receiver prospect in the country by ESPN. He said he couldn't have done any of it without track.

"It helped a lot with recruiters," Williams said.

After he was recruited to play football at Syracuse, he was asked if he'd want to run track in college too.

"I'm pretty sure they're going to make me run the 100. I'll probably do the 4x100. I'll be in spring ball too, so they'll probably have me rotate between football and track."





## Westhill Spring Break Invitational 2025

Both of Williams' parents played Division I sports at The University of Rhode Island. He's had his eye on playing at the DI level for as long as he can remember. He said his mom comes to as many of his meets and games as she can.

"It means a lot because I know a lot of kids, some of their parents can't always make it," Williams said. "It's definitely a blessing to be able to have my mom here and know that she's always supporting."

Even though he won his race, it wasn't nearly his best time. The wind, rain and cold impacted his speed.

"It's definitely not as good as I wanted it to be," Williams said. "I definitely want to get that time down, but I'm not disappointed with it. I'm just going to keep working and get better."

He plans to get faster as the season goes on. He knows his speed will be important on the football turf inside the JMA Wireless Dome next fall.

### **A steeplechase tumble**

Westhill junior Rylee McGann sat on a John Deere Gator with a bag of ice on her left knee and a half-dollar-sized scrape on her cheek. The bottom half of her race number on her right thigh was missing a few pieces. Below it, a large red welt just above her knee.

McGann's legs were in pain during the 2000-meter steeplechase. She slowed down but didn't want to completely stop, so she threw herself over a hurdle. That was when she fell. McGann couldn't continue the race. It was a disappointing end to her first race of the season in a year marked with challenges.

Over the summer, McGann was diagnosed with chronic compartment syndrome. It's an exercise-induced condition that causes a build-up of pressure around the muscles.

"When you get to a certain amount of distance, your calves just start hurting," McGann said. "It feels like there's life-sized weights in my calves, and it hurts a lot."

She had to sit out most of the cross country season, but usually shorter distances, like those she runs for track, don't bother her. With the cold and rain on Tuesday, her condition flared up.

McGann hopes to keep running this spring, despite the setback.

"If I'm not broken," she said.

For now, she's more worried about making sure her face heals in time for prom next week.

At least the rest of the scrapes and bruises will be covered by her long dress, she joked.

### **First-generation college athlete**

Institute of Technology Central's Tyera Johnson started her high school athletics career as a cheerleader.

Her coaches saw her energy, speed and enthusiasm when she ran around on the mats and told her to join the track team.

"I tried it, and I was really good at it," Johnson said. "At first I liked cheer better, but then I saw how far I could go with track and I could go to college because it's my senior year, so I like track more now."

The only family member Johnson knew who went to college was one of her cousins, who got in through track. Johnson got into SUNY Morrisville and plans to run track there. The coaches were at Tuesday's meet watching her, and she's hoping she can get an athletic scholarship to go there.

Johnson placed sixth in the 100-meter dash on Tuesday.

"I didn't do as well as I should have done, but there's a lot of work that I can do to improve," Johnson said. "Keeping my endurance and making sure I pay attention to my time and not the people I'm racing."

As the first in her immediate family to go to college, Johnson is a role model for her teammates. She quit track after her freshman year because she felt like she had too much going on. She's glad her coaches encouraged her to come back.

"I'd say to the freshmen who are just getting into high school, pay attention to who you surround yourself with, be yourself at all times," Johnson said. "And keep (up with) your grades."

Johnson wants to study business administration in college and start her own business. That includes anything from a hair braiding salon to owning some vacation rentals.

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"Pursue your dreams and continue on," she said. "Because you could go really far."

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