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Reunited And It Feels So Good

Thompson sisters unite to bring UIC track team to life.

April 27, 2001

If the past is any indication, the Thompson sisters - Monieka and Tina - will leave an indelible mark on the UIC women's track and field program, in its inaugural season of varsity competition.

"It's funny, as far as our family goes we've been to a lot of places where we've had to be the establishing factor," Monieka said. "My father went out to this church and set up a community organization and we were in charge of putting together the youth group. Then when we got to high school, in my freshman year, most of the top athletes were graduating, so we had of start things all over again to help make them successful."

The past also shows, though, that this sister act couldn't have gotten this far without each others help along the way.

"Monieka's my best friend," said Tina of her older sister. " She inspires me to run hard. She is very modest, that's a good thing. She encourages her teammates and she is very unselfish."

"Tina's bold and that contradicts me, so there is a balance between us," Monieka remarked. "She is very funny and makes me laugh all the time. We've always been close. We'd go on double dates and stuff. We go to church. We have a big family with two more sisters and two more brothers. I don't know what I would do without them."

While most siblings find a competitive rivalry to be almost instinctive, Monieka and Tina have found they have been competing alongside each other more often than against one another.

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"In high school we played different positions in sports and ran different events in track, so we really weren't that competitive with each other," said Monieka. " In a lot of ways we would find ourselves coming together to compete, especially in relays for track."

Monieka, A junior psychology major at UIC, is the more collegiate experienced track competitor, having run as a member of the Flames' club track team in each of the last two years. Monieka, A very modest and unassuming person, almost never showed her abilities at a young age.

"Monieka didn't run at first, it was just me and my sister Tiffany that were considered the runners," remembered Tina. "Then Monieka came out and started winning and we were like `Hey Moneika can run'. She's so quiet and modest she'd never try and run against us. She ran and you never kind of noticed."

People couldn't help but notice by the time Monieka got to high school as she starred in cross-country, basketball and track at Steinmetz High School. On the track is where she truly excelled, as she qualified in five different events for the Illinois State High School Association Championships during her prep career.

Tina, a sophomore communications major, was also a three-sport athlete at Steinmetz, but her sport was basketball, where she earned a spot on the Chicago Public League All-Star Team as a senior and went on to compete on one of the city's top AAU teams. She parlayed her basketball talents in high school into a walk-on role for the UIC women's basketball team for the past two seasons. This spring, however, Tina, a four-time track and field qualifier, decided to reunite with her sister as a member of the UIC track team.

This was music to Monieka's ears.

"I felt more at home because I was so use to running with her," commented Monieka on her sisters return to track. "The past couple of years running without her, things just seemed out of place. Now I feel more comfortable."

That should be a scary thought to Monieka's Midwestern Collegiate Conference opponents as she comes off an indoor season in which she set a meet record en route to winning the 800-meter indoor title. That championship was a real benchmark for Monieka and a very exciting moment for Tina as well.

"That was very uplifting for me," commented Monieka. "I didn't know I could run as fast as I did. I just felt that if I went in and ran the race I normally did I would come in on top."

"She did so well," said Tina. "I was so proud of her. It was really motivating for me to see her strive and accomplish a goal like that."

Now united on the outdoor track squad, the duo is ready to take the UIC program to the next level.

"We're a baby team," said Monieka. "We're just getting started. It's so exciting to try and get this program to the level that I envisioned a Division I program to be."

"We have to set the standard for the track team," Tina said. "From the level of competition and how we train, to how we perform and practice."

In the end, though, the Thompson sisters will be remembered for much more than any time they post on the track, but more for the example they set as members of UIC's inaugural track and field team. A notion Monieka fully comprehends.

"My motto is run and have fun, and nothing but room for improvement."

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