

# Balthis to compete 'Down Under'

By Ryan Peverly  
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If you followed track and field within Preble County last year, chances are you heard about Stephen Balthis.

Then a freshman, Balthis' first year on the Panther varsity track team was memorable to say the least. He was a regional qualifier in the long jump — he jumped an astonishing 21'4" last season — the 300-meter hurdles and as a member of the 4x2 relay team, and also had a good showing in the 110-meter hurdles. Balthis fell two inches short of qualifying to state in the long jump.

Now a sophomore, Balthis, 17, will not only have the chance to set his sights higher in the state of Ohio, he'll have the chance to set them higher on a global stage too.

He was recently invited to compete in the Down Under International Games in Australia by International Sports Specialist, Inc., an event in its 20th year of operation. Only 240 track and field athletes from the United States were invited to the games — which take place from June 26 through July 6 — and they'll be competing against athletes from all over the world.

"My first thought was, 'Wow,'" Balthis said. "I was excited. I called my mom on the phone and told her I had something to show her and I went home and asked her what'd she think if I got invited to a track meet in Australia. She was excited too."

Balthis said the group either saw him in person at the district or regional meet or got hold of film somehow. The invite was extended at the beginning of the school year.

The invitation to compete on a worldwide platform has been well-earned, but it doesn't come free. The trip, which also includes a recreational stop in Hawaii, costs almost \$4,600.

"I think it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I'm going to do everything in my power to get him there," Balthis' mother, Melissa Ramey, said. "But it's an expensive trip."

Balthis, Ramey and Ramey's fiancée, Ron

Kelley, are raising money for the trip by going to area businesses asking for donations and sponsorships, but most businesses have suspended things of that nature due to the slumping economy. Friday and Saturday, March 6-7, they'll hold an inside yard sale at Bethesda Church on Peacock Road in Richmond, and they also have bingo and bake sale events planned. The family is also taking donations for items to be sold at the yard sale.

Regardless of how much money is raised, Ramey said her son will be on the 14-hour plane ride to Australia in late June, something Balthis himself isn't looking forward to.

"I think the whole competition will be nerve-wracking, and I think the competition will be a lot harder than what it is here, but I'm definitely not looking to the plane ride," Balthis said.

Competition isn't anything new to Balthis — who plans on competing in the long jump, 100 hurdles and 4x2 relay while on the trip — who said participating in track and field at South has helped him prepare for something of this magnitude.

"I think our division in track is the hardest in track and the most competitive (in the state)," Balthis said. "I think that's prepared me a little bit for this. But I'm going to keep training after the track season concludes."

As far as goals in the event, what Balthis wants to accomplish doesn't involve anything relating to time or distance.

"It'll be a fun experience and it'll be something I can look back on and say I did," Balthis said. "I just want to go out there and run and compete and have fun, meet new people, represent Ohio and the United States, and show what I can do."

And if last season's marks are any indication, what Balthis can do might surprise quite a few people — even on a global stage.



Steve Balthis

"I'm pretty proud of his accomplishments so far," Ramey said. "He has a lot of talent and I hope he shows what he can do. And I hope this is just the beginning of what he can do."

*(Editor's note: Anyone interested in donating money to Stephen Balthis can make checks payable to International Sports Specialists, Inc. in their desired amount. Checks can be mailed to Balthis or Ramey at 919 N. Barron St., Eaton, OH 45320.)*

## Stephen Balthis

# **Bike Run**

## Dragon's Den

529 South 5th Street, Richmond, IN

**Sunday, April 19th**

Sign in @ 10:00am  
Leave @ 12:00pm

Going to Brookville,  
Metamora, Connersville

\$10.00 - Single Rider  
\$15.00 - Double Rider  
\$3.00 - Plate of food for  
non riders