

Friendly foe captures the Men's Pole Vault event at Michael Johnson Invitational

By Joe Pratt

On a chilly overcast Friday afternoon at the Michael Johnson Invitational, Ben Kirbo stared down the runway needing to mount a 5.40-meter high bar.

Kirbo's turn came on the heels of Cincinnati's Justin Abrams' failed attempt, as the senior who had already set a new personal best on the day barely clipped the bar with his left elbow. In a superman-like effort, Ben Kirbo hoisted himself over the bar, pumping his fists as the padding cradled his fall. The jump tied for the 12th-best in the nation this season.

Baylor freshman pole-vaulter Parker Brannon had achieved the 4.95-meters but could not get over the 5.10-meter stage.

"Even though he goes to TCU, Ben Kirbo is a good friend of mine, and it was fantastic to see him jump so high today," said Brannon, who placed seventh.

Kirbo had three more shots at eclipsing the 5.50-meter mark but took the bar down with him in each of those attempts.

Brannon was happy to cheer on a friendly enemy in Kirbo as the sophomore shattered TCU's outdoor school record.

Going into the meet, Brannon said that he wanted to "just to work on the little things today, not focus on big PR jumps or anything like that. Just the little, technical stuff to improve on."

Brannon was one of two Bears to compete in the event on Friday as senior Chandler Ifft faulted early on. Despite a no-height on the results sheet, Ifft made a difference by guiding his freshman teammate through each stage.

"Chandler definitely has helped me, every single meet that he's been at," Brannon said. "He is super technical, and it really helps me focus on the little things."

In the first meet at home since the Clyde Hart Classic in March, Brannon was following up a fourth-place finish, completing a height that was shorter than the 4.95 meters on Friday.

"It is really, really nice not having to travel 13-plus hours just to go somewhere. This feels like home, I have a lot more confidence here than I have out traveling."

Brannon can get used to the runway in Waco as the Bears are set to host the Big 12 Outdoor Championships, starting on May 9.

"I'm excited to come back here, [the] runway's fast so I'm excited."

The meet was canceled on Saturday afternoon due to inclement weather. Head coach Michael Ford wanted to keep the athletes' safety a priority, and that "it's late in the season, [and] we don't need any injuries."

Baylor is set to visit Tucson, Ariz., for the Desert Heat Classic on April 27. The meet, hosted by the University of Arizona, is the precursor event for the Big 12 Outdoor Championships on May 9-11 in Waco.