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TOP STORY

WKU TRACK AND FIELD

## Morris brings Montserratian pride to track for Hilltoppers

Senior will compete this week at NCAA Championships

BRAD STEPHENS [bstephens@bgdailynews.com](mailto:bstephens@bgdailynews.com) 12 hrs ago

Sprinter Julius Morris poses for a photo on Wednesday, May 30, 2018, at The Charles M. Ruter Track and Field Complex at Western Kentucky University. (Austin Anthony/[photo@bgdailynews.com](mailto:photo@bgdailynews.com))

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Julius Morris will step onto the track this week and run for a championship. He'll represent both his school and the tiny island he calls home.

Morris, a Western Kentucky sprinter, will compete at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Eugene, Ore. The meet begins Wednesday and lasts through Saturday.

The senior will wear the Hilltopper uniform, but he'll also run for his family and friends in Montserrat.

Morris got his start in track and field by running on the grass cricket fields of the Caribbean island – a British territory in the Lesser Antilles.

Morris wanted to pursue track at the NCAA level, so he sent a series of emails to colleges and eventually came to the United States and WKU. Now he'll run for the chance to be an NCAA champion.

“You're going up against athletes that are the best in the world in the category where

they're competing," Morris told the Daily News last week. "So the atmosphere is different. I would say the pressure is different.

"It forces you to compete at a way higher level than you have all year."

Morris booked his ticket to Eugene thanks to standout performances in three men's track events – the 200-meter dash, the 4x100 relay and the 4x400 relay.

Morris scored fifth overall last month in the 200 at the NCAA East Preliminaries, finishing the race in 20.44 seconds. He teamed up with Will Bush, Kymari Gates and Eli Minor in the 4x100 (sixth place, 39.17 seconds) and Gates, Minor and Oliver Alexandre in the 4x400 (second, 3:06.41).

Now Morris and his teammates will try to repeat that success at Oregon's Hayward Field.

"We believe that if he goes out and competes hard, obviously stays healthy, then he's got a chance of finishing in the top portion of the NCAA in three events," WKU coach Erik Jenkins said. "That's something we haven't had. ...

"For Julius to run the 4x100, the 4x400 and the 200, that's difficult to do, and I don't care what school you're at or where you're from."

Morris didn't originally set out to compete at this level of track and field. Growing up in Montserrat, he ran track once a year at an annual school sports event.

Basketball was Morris' favorite sport during his youth on the island, which measures 39 square miles and has a population of less than 5,000.

Morris' father spotted sprinting talent in his son and encouraged him to pursue track.

"He was upfront with me," Morris said of his father. "He was like, 'On the island, you're not going to make it in basketball. Track will be your best opportunity to leave and make something better of yourself.'"

"That was the path I chose, and it ended up being successful. I don't regret it."

No Montserratians before Morris had been through the NCAA track and field system, he said, so he had to forge his own path.

Morris went to an international meet and posted competitive times. He then emailed track and field coaches throughout the U.S., pitching himself to their programs.

Jenkins was the first of those coaches to answer Morris back.

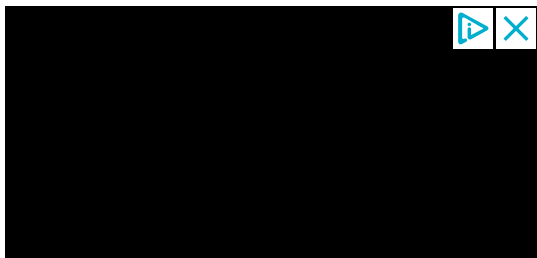
“Western was one of the first schools that responded and took interest in me,” Morris said. “I said I was going to come here, take the opportunity and see where it takes me.”

Morris came to Bowling Green and was immediately impressed by the school’s facilities. After running on grass fields in his homeland, he had a full track complex at his disposal.

“We are very limited in the islands in terms of facilities and resources,” Morris said. “... It’s one of those things that if you want to be successful in any form or fashion, you have to push yourself to get to a point where you think you can be successful and go far with it.”

Morris broke onto the scene as a freshman, earning All-Conference USA honors in the 60 and 200 dashes during the indoor season. He helped WKU claim the 2014-15 C-USA indoors title.





Second-Team All-C-USA indoor honors came the following season after Morris ran the 200 in 20.99 seconds. He then improved on that mark in his sophomore outdoor season with a 20.63, winning the C-USA 200 championship. He went on to become a First-Team All-American in the 4x100 and Second-Team All-American in the 200.

Morris added seven All-C-USA designations during his junior season, running the 200 in a blistering 20.28 seconds at the league's outdoor championships.

"The 200 has always been something special to me," Morris said. "It's a race I've been good at. I've gotten a lot better over the years. It's one of the first races that I competed in at a track meet."

Now a senior, Morris has finished his Hilltopper career on a high note. He was an All-C-USA performer twice at the conference indoor meet and repeated as 200 outdoor champion with a time of 20.32 seconds.

Morris will end his college track and field career this week in Eugene but wants to pursue the sport as a professional. His goals include qualifying for the Summer Olympics to represent Montserrat on an international stage.

Off the track, Morris wants to give back to his homeland as an architect. He studied architectural sciences at WKU, combining his interests in computers and in drawing.

“He’s very talented,” Jenkins said. “When you meet people walking around campus and I have a track shirt on, I’ve had two of his professors stop me and talk about how gifted he was.”

Morris wants to apply those skills to help his fellow Montserratians. A volcano on the island became active in 1995 and its continued activity has rendered much of Montserrat uninhabitable.

People there need buildings for homes and businesses, Morris said, and he wants to lend a hand.

“Architecture is one of the things the island needs in terms of designing buildings, putting down new infrastructure, bringing people back to the island,” Morris said.

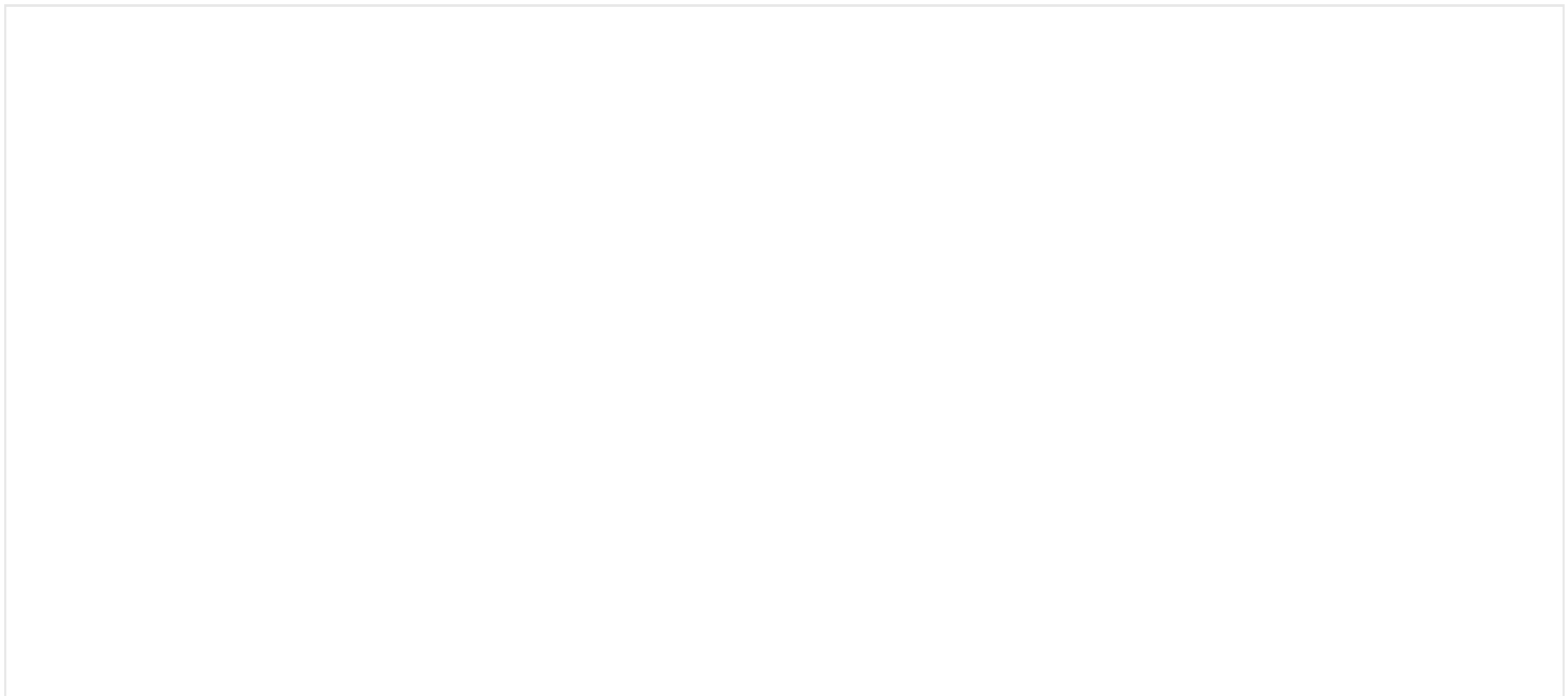
“Putting down that residential infrastructure, putting down those commercial buildings is one of the things that will help draw not only the people that live there, but also new people in tourism.

“I want to contribute the best way I know possible.”

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## Brad Stephens

Bowling Green Daily News sports reporter primarily covering Western Kentucky football and men's basketball.