

**The very thing that's defined her HS career ended her 2018 season. Now, she's better than ever.**



Ridgewood's Katherine Muccio is one of the best comeback stories in N.J. track and field this spring.

(Andrew Mills | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

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It's not that Katherine Muccio ever took competing for granted.

Unfortunate circumstances just happened to offer the [Ridgewood](#) hurdling and sprinting star a new perspective on the sport she's grown to love and thrive in.

It was May 12 of last year when Muccio's promising junior season was derailed by the very thing that has defined her high school athletic career -- a hurdle.

It was the finals of the 100-meter hurdles at the Bergen County Championships and Muccio, then a returning state seventh-place finisher in the 400mH at the Meet of Champions -- was seeking her third individual gold medal at the event.

One day earlier, she had been crowned champion in the 400-meter hurdles and 400-meter dash.

Then, a rare misstep changed everything.

"I clipped my trail leg and came down on it super weird," she said. "And I'd never had any kind of serious injury before."

Her competitive nature and always team-first attitude took over, managing to somehow finish the race and, in fact, *earn a point* for her team by taking sixth.

Her wishful thinking then kicked in, lying on the track of Old Tappan, hoping it was nothing more serious than a minor sprain.

If only that were the case.

Muccio's spring season was gone in a flash, just as state season was approaching.

The damage?

A fracture and tear in the deltoid bone of her right foot. Surgery took place a week later. And Muccio didn't return to even jogging until early November.

She was relegated from captivating athlete to spirited spectator during Ridgewood's North 1, Group 4 sectional championship last spring, with the Maroons holding off Randolph by 11.5 points.

This week, back at the sectionals in Clifton with a back-and-better-than-ever Muccio, North Jersey took witness to what they missed out on one year ago.

Gold in the 200. Gold in the 400. Gold in the 400 hurdles. And bronze in the 100 hurdles.

Muccio's 36-point performance led Ridgewood to a dominant repeat sectional crown, again over a very good Randolph team, by 29.5 points. Ridgewood finished with 120.5 points, while Randolph finished runner-up with 91.

"I think at a meet like sectionals, you're just running and thinking of your teammates," said Muccio, who'll compete for the University of Penn next year. "It's about seeing how fast you go and the places you can get so it benefits everyone on the team. It's a much different experience than I had last year. In terms of helping, it was nice to be able to compete this time."

Muccio now has two weeks left to leave her mark in state history, with upcoming Groups and the MOC.

It's already been a special senior season that has included the following highlights: three major meet wins in the 400mH, including a state-leading 1:01.13 on the very track and in the same meet her season ended last spring, a first-place finish in the 300mH at Arcadia in California to open the year, two 400-meter dash titles and two 100-meter dash titles.

She also ran the fastest 400-meter split (56.79) on Ridgewood's distance medley team at the Penn Relays (11:54.22 overall) and, with teammates Virginia Morley and Victoria Purritano, broke the Bergen County 400mH relay record -- for the second straight year -- with a combined time of 3:13.00.

She has already started reflecting on her high school career coming to an end, but realizes there's still more work left to be done over the final few weeks.

No experience is taken for granted -- not after taking adversity head on and coming out on top.

"The end of this season, it's bittersweet," Muccio said. "This senior class we have is amazing.

We're all so close and there's no other group I'd rather be doing all of this with. I'm excited for the next two weeks. I'll keep doing what the coaches tell me to do and keep working hard.

"After that, we'll see how the pieces fall."