

Kitchen wins two in U.S. farewell

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HACKENSACK -- In a perfect world, the United States and Zimbabwe would be as close as New Jersey and New York. That way Tinashe Kitchen wouldn't have to choose between family and the sport he loves.

But there's no such thing as perfect. So when his father, Meshack, a Zimbabwean diplomat, told the family they would have to return to Africa, Kitchen knew he had no choice but to leave. This evening, the Fort Lee junior -- one of the best sprinters in Northern New Jersey -- will board a plane bound for England, and then another to Zimbabwe with his parents and three younger siblings.

But before he said his final goodbye to competitive New Jersey athletics, Kitchen made his presence felt one last time Thursday. He blew by the competition, earning two gold medals in the 55- and 400-meter dashes at the Ed Church Invitational at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

"It hasn't settled in yet that I'm leaving, I guess," Kitchen said after finishing the 400 in 51.6 seconds. "I'm excited because I won both of my events, but I'm also disappointed. It's my last time doing this."

On any other day, at any other meet, placing second wouldn't have been the worst thing. But not Thursday. Kitchen had to go out on top, for himself, his teammates and more importantly his coach, Paul Jayson.

"I feel like I owe him a lot because he gave me a chance," Kitchen said.

And he didn't disappoint.

"I've never had a quality sprinter like him," Jayson said. "Watching his competitive spirit, his desire, his toughness -- it's wonderful."

Last spring, Kitchen took four gold medals at his team's league meet at 100, 200, 400 meters and the 4-x-400 relay. On four occasions he ran the 400 under 50 seconds.

Given his three-year success with the Bridgemen, one can only imagine how great he will be in Africa. Still, he is uncertain about his future.

"I rather stay because there are more opportunities here," said Kitchen, who will attend a private school in Africa. "There are opportunities there, but probably not the same level. Hopefully I can come back here for college. But it's up to my parents and what they think. I hope this is the start of something new, not the end."