

▪ [Buy a car](#) ▪ [Event tickets](#) ▪ [Job search](#) ▪ [Real estate](#) ▪ [Shopping](#)

Search

How do I find it?

Advertisement

Online College Degrees

Get an accredited BA, PHD or many programs today.

www.classesusa.com



[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Travel](#)

[Money](#)

[Sports](#)

[Life](#)

[Tech](#)

[Weather](#)

Sports » Other Colleges [Polls](#)



Buffalo sprinter and jumper Reggie Rucker reads with his daughter Alanah. Rucker had known her since she was born in 2002 but only until 2005 did he find out he was her father.

By Jerome Davis, for USA TODAY

Updated 14h ago | [Comments](#)

10

| [Recommend](#)

15

| [E-mail](#) | [Save](#) | [Print](#) | [Reprints & Permissions](#) |

[RSS](#)



By Jerome Davis, for USA TODAY

Buffalo hurdler Rucker leaps into fatherhood

By [Erik Brady](#), USA TODAY

BUFFALO — Reggie Rucker yawns as he waits recently on the corner near his rented apartment, exhausted from the overnight shift at Wal-Mart and his morning classes and afternoon track practice at the University at Buffalo.

A yellow school bus approaches, and his demeanor shifts from bone-weary to bright-eyed. A 4-year-old girl with a purple backpack gets off and runs into his arms, bubbling with pre-K news. As he carries her to the door, they are cheek to cheek.

The resemblance is startling. She has his smile.

That's how he learned a secret about her. He had known Alanah since she was born to a former girlfriend in Rochester, N.Y., in 2002. He never had reason to suspect the child was his — another man's name was on the birth certificate — until the mother told him for the first time in 2005 he

[+](#) Enlarge

Father and daughter take their dog out for a walk. Rucker has juggled school, work, track and his daughter as part of a very busy schedule.

QUOTE

"Always before, I was about me. How fast I can go, how much I can do. Now my life is all about her."

- Reggie Rucker of his daughter Alanah



[+](#) [Enlarge](#) By Jerome Davis, for USA TODAY

Rucker stretches during training. The 23-year old won the 110- and 400-meter hurdles at Saturday's Mid-American Conference track and field championships at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Back in February, he won the MAC indoor title in the 60-meter hurdles.

plate compared to what your teammates face.' And he said, 'I want to see how fast I can go.' "

Saturday's answer: 14.05 seconds at 110 meters and a track-record 50.75 seconds at 400, ninth-best time in the nation this season, according to Buffalo officials who say it qualifies him for the NCAA championships June 6-9 in Sacramento. He'll also compete in the NCAA East Regional on May 25-26 at the University of Florida.

His times Saturday broke his school records — he also holds Buffalo's indoor marks at 55 and 60 meters — and he was on the 4x100 relay that finished third.

Alanah watched from the stands with a babysitter when Rucker won at 110 meters. They met at the gate between stands

might be the father.

"That's when it struck me in the eyes," he says. "She looks just like me."

FIND MORE STORIES IN: [Buffalo](#) | [Rochester](#) | [Father](#) | [Leroy Woods](#)

He says he saved for weeks to pay \$545 for a paternity test. It proved he was the father. He petitioned for custody, alleging in family court that Alanah was living amid drugs and alcohol. Last summer, after almost a year of legal wrangling, he was awarded exclusive primary physical residency. The days since have been busy but blessed.

This is the story of a hurdler whose sport is a metaphor for his life and the daughter who taught him to be a man in full. He leaps the barricades of fatherhood, work, school and sports. She gives him reason to run — and to love.

"Always before, I was about me," he says. "How fast I can go, how much I can do. Now my life is all about her."

Rucker, 23, won the 110- and 400-meter hurdles at Saturday's Mid-American Conference track and field championships at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He won the MAC indoor title in the 60-meter hurdles Feb. 24.

All of this almost never happened. Rucker decided last year he had no more time for track. He would forgo a final season of eligibility at Buffalo to work, raise his daughter and take dental tech courses at Erie Community College in suburban Buffalo.

"I had to start doing the father thing, had to make sure I had money coming in," Rucker says. "So it was work at night, school by day, take care of Alanah and try to sleep in there somewhere. Track wasn't in my pedigree anymore."

At Christmas, he took Alanah to his mother's home in Rochester, an hour away. He entered an open track meet there Dec. 27. He hadn't hurdled since high school — he had sprinted, jumped and run relays at Buffalo — but that day he ran the 55-meter hurdles in 7.48 seconds.

"I thought, 'My goodness, we need to get him back in school,' " Buffalo track coach Perry Jenkins says. Two weeks later, after much soul-searching, Rucker called to say he was returning.

"I said, 'Reggie, are you sure?' " Jenkins says. "I can work with you with your daughter and your classes and your job. But that's a lot on your

and track. "I put the gold medal on her," Rucker says. "She was as excited as I was."

Such a circumstance — single father as primary caregiver — is rare in college athletics.

"All I can tell you is I have never heard of it before," Buffalo athletics director Warde Manuel says. The only comparable example he could think of was Ray Ray McElrathbey, the Clemson cornerback given custody of his brother last year.

Time crunch

Rucker's degree in African-American studies was conferred Sunday, but he did not attend. He completed requirements for the degree before returning to Buffalo in January.

His track scholarship covered tuition and books but not room and board. According to school officials, he received a total of almost \$5,000 from a federal Pell grant, a student loan and the NCAA special-assistance fund to cover living expenses.

Rucker made \$9.35 an hour at Wal-Mart until quitting this month for a job as a monitor in Buffalo's recreation department. He says he worked five nights a week, 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., pulling pallets and stocking drinks when he began at Wal-Mart in the fall. He scaled that down to four nights when he returned to Buffalo, then three, then two as the semester progressed.

"I was falling asleep in class," Rucker says. "Coach told me you can't run right if you can't sleep."

Rucker would return home by 7:30 a.m., get Alanah on the bus for school by 8:25 and go to sleep for a few hours, if at all, before class and track practice. He commutes by bus, getting home each day by 4 p.m. so he can meet Alanah's bus between 4:15 and 4:30.

When he worked nights, Patrick Tindal, his housemate, often watched Alanah. Tindal's girlfriend, Celestine Coney, drove Alanah seven hours to Oxford to see her father run in Saturday's meet.

"Going to the meets," Rucker says, "is like going on vacation."

He says this while laughing in his living room as Alanah empties her Dora the Explorer backpack. She solemnly shows her father a slight cut on her finger. He gets her a bandage. She puts it on herself.

"You did a good job," he says. "You could be a nurse. You have to do mine when I get hurt."

"I will," she says with a musical laugh. They smile their identical smiles.

"She is a very confident little girl," says Roslyn E. Scruggs, her pre-K teacher at Buffalo's Harriet Ross Tubman P.S. 31. "She's doing very well, she gets along well with her classmates and she loves her dad dearly, you can tell. And she is very talkative."

That was clear May 1 at Buffalo's athletics banquet, where Rucker was a finalist for male athlete of the year, won by wrestler Mark Budd. As Rucker's picture appeared on a big screen, a small voice called out, "That's you, Daddy!" The hall swelled with laughter.

"He's got his hands full with that one," Jenkins says.

'Then along came Alanah'

Heather Page, 21, is Alanah's mother. She and Rucker say they got to know each other while growing up in Rochester because Rucker was a close friend of her brother and often at their house.

"Me and Reggie never dated," Page says. "We were just best friends for a while. And then along came Alanah."

She was born in Rochester on Aug. 22, 2002. The presumed father was Page's longtime boyfriend. Rucker saw the child

often over the years. He says it wasn't until 2005 that Page alternately hinted and denied Alanah was his.

"He needs to stop lying," Page says by phone. "The only thing I said was, 'You're the possible.' "

Once he established paternity, Rucker alleged in Monroe County Family Court that Alanah was living in a neighborhood where drugs were used and sold. (Family court records are not public.) Page did not appear at the custody trial. Rucker and Page were awarded joint custody, but Rucker got physical residency, unusual in a case where the father was not in the picture for years.

"The court only decided that because I didn't show up," Page says. "I had something I had to do," a doctor's appointment she says she made because she thought she was pregnant again, which turned out not to be the case.

Page says she is OK with Alanah living with her father: "There's a reason she's with him. I don't want her in Rochester because of the circumstances that go on here: drugs, jail and drive-bys. That's why I'd rather let her be out there."

During the time she lived in an unsafe neighborhood, Page says, she sent Alanah to live with her aunt. Page says she lives in a safe area now and has visitation rights every other weekend. Page says she has not been able to get Alanah often "because I keep having to work" at McDonald's.

Sunday, Rucker went to Rochester to see his mother for Mother's Day and dropped Alanah off with Page at Page's mother's house.

Page declined a request to allow Ronald Goldman, her attorney in the custody case, to speak to USA TODAY. Rucker allowed Monroe County assistant public defender Jonathon Altman, his attorney in that case, to speak.

"Reggie had a lot of hurdles to overcome — legal hurdles, I mean," Altman says. "Another man had paternity established. We had to fight to get that vacated. Reggie not being in his child's life for three years was a huge hurdle ... but the fact is he was clearly the better choice.

"Most guys in his position — and I know, I see it every day — they just couldn't care less. They try to avoid any responsibility, try to get out of child support, try any which way not to give anything. Reggie stepped up and went the whole nine and did everything he could to be a father to this child."

Support staff

Rogia Rosemberg, 20, is a junior pre-dental student at Buffalo. She was born in Haiti and moved to the USA at 12. She and Rucker began dating during her freshman year.

They broke up a year ago this month. Rucker says it was partly because of the pressure the custody battle put on their relationship.

"It wasn't really about Alanah, because she wasn't here yet," Rosemberg says. "I just felt like I needed a break from everything."

They remained friends, kept talking and reunited in February.

"Now she considers herself the stepmother," Rucker says. "She's a big part of our lives. She keeps me on top of things. When she comes in the house, before she says hello, she calls me out: 'Why is Alanah still in her school clothes?' Like a mom would do. On one side, I hate it, it's aggravating. On the other side, it helps me out. It's crazy. I love her a lot."

They talk about marriage.

"We can't tell the future, but it's a possibility," Rosemberg says. "I think we're great with each other."

Rucker says marriage is important to him because his parents never married. His mother, Tammy Rucker, 44, has seven

children by four fathers. Reggie is her only child by Leroy Woods, 50.

"My father wasn't around when I was growing up," Rucker says. "I always told myself, 'When I get a child, I'll always be there. I want my child to know who I am and what I'm about.' "

Woods moved to Rochester from Orlando last year to be near his son and granddaughter.

"I should have been around more, but I wasn't," Woods says. "Now I am. Sometimes you can't recapture the past, but I'm trying."

Tammy Rucker, who still has four children at home, says she is proud of her son for raising his daughter.

"I'm a single mother," she says. "I know how hard it is."

Rucker says everyone told him how hard it would be. He says on this point everyone was wrong.

"Yeah, it takes all your time and your undivided attention," he says. "But it isn't hard. I mean, it's work, but it isn't hard work, because I love it. It's a good job. It's the best job there is."

Posted 15h 20m ago

Updated 14h ago

E-mail | Save | Print | Reprints & Permissions | [RSS](#)

To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor **Brent Jones**

Conversation guidelines: USA TODAY welcomes your thoughts, stories and information related to this article. Please stay on topic and be respectful of others. Keep the conversation appropriate for interested readers across the map.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Log in](#) | [Register](#)

Submit

Comments: (10)



Kaine1911 wrote: 50m ago

Irregular guy,

Why did you have to ruin such a positive message board with bias and ignorance. There are many more young men out there like this young man. Sadly people look at the stats of unwed parents in the black community to validate their individual prejudice, ignorance, and reasoning behind using poor americans as the thesis of what's wrong with America. So your name fits you well because your thought pattern and ideology shows just how ignorant you really are.

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)



SeekWisdom wrote: 1h 1m ago

My sincere and heartfelt well-wishes go out to Reggie, Rogia and Alanah! This story brought me to tears because this young man gets it! I believe the majority of the ills in our society today is in direct correlation to the weakening, and the lack of support, for the family structure- so when I see a young person go to such lengths to ensure he provides that sense of family for his child it's truly inspirational.

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)



exasEducation wrote: 1h 39m ago

"He never had reason to suspect the child was his..."

Odd statement considering he had sex with the mother. I do respect him stepping up and doing his duty now. Of course this shouldn't be news; it should be expected and the norm.

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)



IrregularGuy wrote: 2h 9m ago

Would someone please forward this article to Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Al Sharpton, and Jesse Jackson? I can't understand why THIS GUY isn't the poster child for diversity and cultural differences in America. This man is a guy who made mistakes, stepped up and accepted them, and is raising a well adjusted child. Without a crystal ball to look into, I'd bet a significant sum that Alanah grows up to be the same sensible, respectable adult her dad is.

[Recommend](#) **3** | [Report Abuse](#)



10sGuy wrote: 4h 9m ago

Its about time we here about all the good things black men are doing. I wish him all the success in life. Reggie Keep your head up man, you are doing a great job by sticking with your daughter and taken care of your responsibility.

Good luck in the future. May God bless you and your family.

[Recommend](#) **2** | [Report Abuse](#)



haiku208 wrote: 4h 34m ago

Thank you God!! A positive, educated, black man taking care of himself and daughter. We needed this story because we do not see black men in a positive light in this society. He made a mistake and he made the hard choices so that he could be there for his child. he broke the cycle in his family. God bless you Reggie and your baby!

[Recommend](#) **2** | [Report Abuse](#)



luaunap wrote: 4h 43m ago

not to take anything away from this young man, but why do single fathers get news coverage? there are plenty of single mothers who are going to school, working fulltime, and taking care of their kid (s). can you do an article or two about them?

Recommend | Report Abuse



cwoods30 wrote: 5h 57m ago

I wish Mr. Rucker and Alanah all the best in life. If only more young men in the U.S .were like him we would live in a much better place. What a wonderful story. Good luck to you SIR!!!

Recommend | Report Abuse



Dr. JB Smith wrote: 7h 46m ago

This is a great story: touching, sensitive, instructive. It could certainly be a good influence on others such as Mr. Rucker, who are contemplating stepping up to the responsibility of parenthood. As a father of four, I know how difficult parenting is; but it's the hardest job you'll ever love. Reggie's story brought tears to my eyes. I'm proud of him. Alanah is a lucky little girl!
Dr. JB Smith
Camden, Maine

Recommend **2** | Report Abuse



Cubfan wrote: 13h 26m ago

It is great to see a positive story about a man accepting responsibility for his child. He should inspire other young men to do the same.

Recommend **4** | Report Abuse

Sponsored Links

Improve your Sport Performance with LJ100

Natural anabolic, clinically proven to increase free testosterone, DHEA, cGMP, cAMP, & ATP production,...

www.herbal-powers.com

What's Your Credit Score?

The average U.S. credit score: 675. The cost to see yours: \$0.

www.FreeCreditReport.com

Lower Your Blood Pressure

Non Drug. No Side Effects. Proven to Work in 7 Clinical Trials

Resperate.com

Buy a link here

Advertisement



Newspaper Home Delivery - Subscribe Today

Home • News • Travel • Money • Sports • Life • Tech • Weather

About USATODAY.com: Site Map | FAQ | Contact Us | Jobs with Us | Terms of Service

[Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Right](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Reprints and Permissions](#)

News Your Way: [Mobile News](#) | [Email News](#) | [Add USATODAY.com RSS feeds](#)

Partners: [USA WEEKEND](#) | [Sports Weekly](#) | [Education](#) | [Space.com](#)

Copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.