

Hannah Godwin, Sophomore, Kearney High School

Pat McFadden, the girls' track coach at Kearney High School, got lucky. Way back in the fall of 2015, Sunrise Middle School in Kearney didn't have a 7th grade volleyball team. Hannah Godwin needed something to do since her softball team didn't play in the fall, so she joined the cross country team. It was an unremarkable season for Hannah, except for this one thing: she discovered that she liked distance running. She liked how she could measure her improvement and she liked running with teammates. However, let's be honest: she didn't like running as much as softball.

Fortunately, she did like running enough to return for 8th grade cross country. She added some light mileage during the summer, and she committed to heavier mileage (still less than 15 miles per week) during the fall. The result was a string of victories, culminating with a title at the Nebraska Junior High State Championship. She was also undefeated during the track season, ending with State titles and PRs in the 800 (2:27) and 1600 (5:27).

If you go an entire year without losing a race, you might get a little overconfident. Hannah realizes now that didn't give her best effort during summer conditioning, and she offers that "I took some early lumps during cross country my freshman year. I knew that high school competitors would be good, but I didn't realize it they would be THAT good." She eventually adjusted, and Coach McFadden learned that she thrived on competition – the tougher the field, the harder she worked and the more she learned from a race. After finishing 7th in a District field stacked with teams from Millard, she earned a 12th place finish at the 2017 State meet. Her track results were even better: she qualified for State in all three distance events, finishing 9th in the 3200 (11:29), 8th in the 1600 (5:15) and 6th in the 800 (2:23). Out of an exceptional class across the state, Hannah and Jenna Muma of Lincoln East were the only freshman girls to medal in an individual distance event.

This past summer, Hannah juggled playing on a traveling softball team with running an average of 30 miles per week. When she could, she took Gus, her golden lab, on runs of up to five miles. During cross country season, her lowest finish was 5th place in 19:58 at the Harold Scott Invite at Pioneer's Park. She finished 3rd in Districts, and then placed 4th at State in 19:18 behind Kaylie Crews (Papio South), Jenna Muma and Ellie Dahl (Fremont). She wrapped up her season with a 18:48 at Nike Regionals, where she was the third fastest Nebraskan behind 8th-grader Kylie Muma and Kaylie Crews.

During the winter, Hannah averaged 25-30 miles per week, much of it on the treadmill. She swam laps one to two days per week and lifted weights, although she knows she could do more. Hannah has had a successful spring. Her season bests are 2:22 (8th fastest this year), 5:17 (7th) and 11:14 (2nd). At Districts on May 10, Hannah and Grace Bonsall quickly broke away from the field in both the 1600 and 3200, and Hannah qualified for State in the 1600 and 3200, running 5:15 and 11:32.

In addition to running and softball, Hannah played basketball and soccer through 8th grade. She's an active member of the Key Club, has been admitted to the National Arts Honor Society, and tries to read as much as she can in her limited spare time.

Hannah is quick to acknowledge that the depth of Kearney's distance squad has been a key part of her success. Eight Kearney girls have qualified for State in the three distance races and 4x800 relay, and

Alexis Mishou is the only senior. Junior Grace Bonsall has been Hannah's shadow in many of her races this year, and Grace was ranked 9th in the 3200 prior to District competition.

I often conclude interviews by asking runners for any advice they can share with younger runners, and Hannah was full of it. Her comments included:

- "Don't give up at the beginning of your running career. It's easy to doubt yourself, but the hard work pays off."
- "I run better when I'm not stressed out." Her best result at the 2018 State track meet came in the 800, which she considered to be her least competitive event, because she had no expectations of medaling.
- "Allow your coaches to keep setting new goals once you meet the old ones. Don't settle."
- Don't cheat yourself on food. She mostly eats well during the season, but there are a lot of Doritos and Oreos in the world, and it's her responsibility to eat her share of them.

Hannah is only a sophomore, so it's unlikely we've seen her best times. She would eventually like to drop under 2:20 and 5:10, and she'd like to break the 3200 school record of 11:06. She readily acknowledges that she's in the best shape of her short career, and she's looking forward to State. Her favorite part of a race is the last 100 meters. When someone like Hannah focuses her talent, hard work and competitiveness on the finish line, those 100 meters can be pretty amazing.

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