

Kaylie Crews and Olivia Rosenthal, Papillion South High School

The Papillion South girls track team is ranked second in the Nebraska coaches' poll entering the State meet. The team features sprinters Nina Cuevas (100/200), Tate Norblade (200/400) and Olivia Sattlefield (hurdles), all of who are medal contenders at State. However, Papio South's position on the podium may be impacted in the distance races, where both Papio South, top-ranked Lincoln Southwest and Fremont have performed at a high level all season. Papio South's distance team is led by sophomore Kaylie Crews and freshman Olivia Rosenthal.

While only a sophomore, Kaylie has already established a list of impressive results. She started running early, joining her elementary school running club and taking part in fun runs with her family. She didn't run competitively until junior high, instead playing soccer, softball and basketball through 8th grade. She finished 14th and 9th, respectively, at the State junior high cross country meet as a 7th and 8th grader, but she felt the 3,000 meter distance was too short to capitalize on her strengths.

Kaylie connected with Papio South distance coach Jeremy Haselhorst during her 8th grade year, and she was a committed summer running participant prior to her freshman year. Those miles and the longer high school race distance paid off for Kaylie, who received a boost of confidence after finishing 6th in her first high school race. As she season progressed, she moved to the front of the pack in most races with teammate Anna Jennings, and she earned a 7th place finish in 19:34 at State cross country. She had a strong track season, posting PRs of 5:28 and 11:24, and she qualified for State track meet in both races. While she didn't medal in the 2018 meet, her experience at Burke convinced her that she could develop the speed necessary to compete in distances below 5,000 meters.

Last summer, Kaylie increased her mileage to about 30 miles per week – she's not sure of the exact number because she doesn't keep a log – and she occasionally swam laps for a change of pace. A year of growth and the extra miles led to outstanding times in the fall, with a PR of 18:30 at Districts in Columbus and a blazing 18:42 at State in Kearney. She captured 1st at State with a 23-second win over Jenna Muma. She's built on that success this track season, posting times of 2:31, 5:20 and 11:07. When we spoke two weeks ago, she told me her goal this season was to run in the low 5:20's and sub-11:20. She accomplished both goals less than a week later at Metros, so she may need to refocus on her career goals of a sub 5:15 and a sub-11:00. This past Friday, she comfortably qualified for State with a 5:22 and 11:19 at Districts.

Coach Haselhorst has developed many distance runners, but he feels that Kaylie's ability to learn from races, whether she wins or loses, sets her apart from other runners. Throughout this season, she's taken different risks and race tactics to see what will work best for her at State. While he agrees that she's extremely talented, "she maximizes her talent through her work ethic and passion for running." She also has a great support system at home that supports her but keeps her grounded. In addition to running, Kaylie participated in the marching band as a freshman (she still plays on her trap set at home as a stress reliever), is a member of the Titan Ambassador Team to welcome new students, and works at Chick-fil-A. Chick-fil-A milkshakes are her guilty pleasure.

Although only a sophomore, Kaylie has been a mentor to Olivia. Olivia also joined her elementary school's running club in 4th grade, but she didn't run a race until she ran the mile at a track meet on the

last day of 6th grade. During elementary school, she played softball, basketball and volleyball, but she never found much success in any of those sports. As a 7th grader, she joined the cross country and track teams, and looked up to 8th graders Kaylie and Grace Charlesworth. She finished 55th and 21st at the state junior high cross country meet in 7th and 8th grade. Her best effort during junior high was a 5:45 in 8th grade. While the time wasn't remarkable, it reflected Olivia's limited mileage, and Coach Haselhorst knew he would be getting an exceptional athlete.

Olivia ran with the Papio South during the summer before her freshman year, averaging just over 30 miles per week. She said that she "took my lumps" early in the cross country season, but realized pretty quickly that she had the ability to stay with upperclassmen. Even on her bad days, her coaches and teammates were so positive that she never doubted her progress. She finished the season on a high note, placing 13th at the State cross country meet in 19:48.

Olivia's brief high school track career has been exceptional. Coach Haselhorst remarks that Olivia's most unique trait may be her fearlessness – she shows no fear of failure and does not shy away from a painful effort. At the Titan Classic, over a span of four hours, she outsprinted Jenna Muma, Madi Muma, Devyn McDonald and Taylor Searcey in the last 100 meters to win the 800, and then narrowly lost a duel with Jenna Muma in the 1600. In her nine races this spring prior to Districts, she's won six events and placed second the other three times, losing only to Jenna Muma, Lindsay Blehm and Ellie Dahl. Her season bests include 2:21.2 (1st at Metros and 5th fastest in State prior to Districts) and 5:16.1 (1st at Metros and 6th fastest at State). Her busy day at Metros also included a leg on the winning 4x800 relay and a last-minute replacement for an ill teammate on the 2nd place 4x400 team. She has qualified for State in the 800 and 1600, but she could be an option for the two relays.

Papio South has two top-notch distance coaches – Haselhorst for the girls' team and Shanon Stenger for the boys' team – and the teams are together quite a bit. I asked Kaylie if she's observed different coaching styles for the two teams, and she agreed she has. Because girls tend to doubt themselves, she notes that Coach Haselhorst spends considerable time talking to his team about the mental side of running. In previous conversations with Coach Haselhorst, he's shared with that he believes that distance running is a great tool to improve a student's character, academic work and self-worth, and that drives his coaching approach. Kaylie also reports that the girls' team trains intensely less often than the boys' team, with Coach Haselhorst emphasizing the importance of listening to their bodies to avoid overtraining.

It's possible the Class A distance field has never had so much parity, with as many as 10 girls having a legitimate shot at the top 3 medals in each race at the State meet. Kaylie and Olivia are poised to have great races but, more importantly, they're setting their foundations for a successful life in and outside of running.

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