

Katie Williams, Senior, Omaha Marian High School

Katie Williams, a senior distance runner at Omaha Marian, has two pieces of advice for younger athletes: “Don’t let one bad season define your career,” and “Hard work will take you far in distance running.” Spend just a few minutes with her and you’ll realize that this young lady has lived both of those lessons.

Katie lives in Papillion but chose to attend Marian in large part because she wanted to be part of Marian’s renowned soccer program. She played club soccer through the fall of 9th grade, but soon realized that she would be more successful at running – a sport she hadn’t picked up until 8th grade. She ran track her freshman year and then joined cross country for the first time as a sophomore. The Marian team did not qualify for State her sophomore year, and that disappointment led Katie to work harder over the winter. She qualified for the State track meet in both the 800 and 1600 as a sophomore, narrowly missing the medal stand. Her junior year was even better: she finished 3rd in State cross country and then collected three State track medals in the 800 (3rd), 1600 (7th) and 3200 (5th).

Despite having so much success as a junior, Katie had even greater expectations for her final senior year, so she increased her mileage over the summer – running as much as 60 miles per week. In retrospect, Katie now realizes she increased her mileage too quickly to a level that her body couldn’t sustain, and she had ‘dead legs’ once the season started. She also struggled with a sprained ankle and all the stress that hits seniors, including applying for colleges. Her final cross country season never got on track, her legs never felt fresh, and she ended the season with a discouraging 49th-place finish at State.

Katie ran sparingly the remainder of 2016. She took two weeks off to prepare for her pit band role in Marian’s annual musical. When she began running again, she felt a sharp pain in her knee, so she hung up her running shoes for nearly two more months. In lieu of running, Katie dedicated herself to cross-training on a bike and elliptical. She also spent several months performing physical therapy exercises to address a hip alignment issue that led to her knee pain. By the time she returned to the treadmill in January 2017, her injuries were resolved – and her love for running had returned.

Katie has returned to form on the track this season, running season-bests of 2:15, 5:10 and 11:31. Her times place her near the top of Class A at each distance, and she’s run well at each meet. With her confidence back, Katie is hoping to compete for a State championship, although she knows that the Class A competition is particularly tight in the 800 and 1600. Racing strategy often trumps fast times in the last three weeks of the season, but she would love to run 2:15, 5:05 and 11:10 before the season ends.

After her injuries in 2016, Katie has found that 30-40 miles per week is right for her. She lifted weights three mornings per week from January to March, but since April has focused on core work and body-weight exercises. Her favorite workout is four sets of a two 400s at 800 race pace with a 90-second rest between the two 400s and a five-minute rest between each set. She is quick to credit her coach, Roger Wright, for how supportive he’s been during the past year and his collaborative approach to setting her race schedule.

In addition to running and band – she’s a two-time All-State honoree for the tuba - Katie is also active in the science club, Marian retreats and the campus ministry. She’s an outstanding student, and she will be attend MIT (Boston) this fall. She plans to run distance for MIT, but her primary goal is to earn an engineering degree or prepare for medical school.

Like many runners, she has a pump-up song she listens to before she races. Her song is ‘Bounce Back,’ by Big Sean, and over the past year she has lived these lyrics: “Last night took an L, but tonight I bounce back.”

Resiliency and determination have defined Katie Williams’ running career, but the lessons she’s learned in running will no doubt play a key role in the next phase of her life – as a runner, leader, musician and scholar.

Jay Slagle is a volunteer writer for the Nebraska Elite TC website. The father of three teenagers, including a Creighton Prep runner, Jay is a self-professed running nerd who was never good at running. He has written two children’s books available for sale on Amazon. Visit www.jayslagle.com for more information.