

Ethan Goldner, Senior, Omaha Westside High School

When a cross country coach draws up a plan for preparing runners for the state meet, it's unlikely to include playing a competitive soccer match 40-some hours before the gun goes off. However, when your cross country roster includes someone like Ethan Goldner, you adapt, and that's what Coach Andrew Easton has done.

Haven't heard much about Ethan Goldner, a senior at Omaha Westside? That's not a surprise. Distance running is not a high-profile sport, but even less so for cross country athletes who play soccer in the spring. However, Ethan boasts – well, that's not accurate, because Ethan doesn't boast – a notable history in both high school cross country and soccer.

Let's start with the past. Ethan has played competitive soccer since elementary school. He's started on Westside's varsity team the past three years when the Westside team reached the state semifinals once and the state finals twice. His 13 goals and 9 assists were among the Class A state leaders in Spring 2017. During part of the summer and most of the fall, he plays for Sporting OFC.

His running background is much briefer. With a little encouragement from his father, a lifelong runner, he joined the cross country team in eighth grade to improve his fitness level for soccer. He quickly realized he enjoyed running and found some success, placing 16th at the Junior High state meet. He's continued to improve since then, in part due to improved strength, a better pre-race routine and better race tactics. He placed 13th at State as a sophomore and 4th at State as a junior. With three seniors finishing ahead of him in 2017, Ethan is the highest-placed returner this year. In addition, Ethan and Jose Gonzalez (Fremont) have an opportunity to become three-time State medalists this year, something that only thirteen other Class A runners have accomplished in the past decade.

Ethan's high school career has featured a balancing act between running and soccer. Ethan has a fairly predictable soccer schedule, with three to four practices or games per week, so Coach Easton schedules hard workouts on Ethan's off days. Ethan typically starts the season a bit undertrained due to his summer soccer schedule, so he focuses on regaining his fitness level during the early part of the season. He gets the majority of his speed work through soccer, so his most difficult running workouts are primarily tempo runs. Coach Easton and Ethan talk frequently during the season to monitor his fatigue and fitness levels, and Coach Easton also keeps in touch with him during the offseason.

Athletes who play both soccer and run cross country – and their cross country coaches – walk a tightrope. Run too much and risk overuse injuries. Run too little and they may not be competitive at State. While Ethan loves soccer, he insists that year-round soccer shouldn't be an excuse for skipping cross country. It does take some flexibility from both coaches, but he's glad he's done it.

A year from now Ethan will be in college, but he's already preparing. He's participating in the UNMC High School Alliance this year, so after a morning of classes at Westside, he spends every afternoon at UNMC attending medical-based classes such as Pathology, Anatomy, Infectious Diseases and Pharmacology. He would like to pursue a career in either medicine or bio-engineering. Given the challenging coursework for either path, Ethan thinks it's unlikely that he could juggle his academic

demands with a team-based endeavor like soccer. However, he'd like to explore running for a college if he's a good fit for the program at whichever college he chooses.

For his final high school cross country season, Ethan hopes to leave his mark. He'd like to break 16:00 and be in the hunt for a State title. He's been ranked among the Class A top 5 for much of the season. His early-season results have been promising, and he's typically peaked well the past three years, cutting his times by at least 45 seconds from the start of each season. He's been consistently running 40-50 miles per week since mid-summer, and this year he's actually considering not playing a soccer game on the Wednesday night before State. However, he hasn't completely ruled it out; with the Class A races starting at 4:30 this year, who knows what he could do with just two hours more rest?

Jay Slagle is a volunteer writer for the Nebraska Elite TC website who posts race pictures at www.facebook.com/preprunningnerd and race results at @preprunningnerd on Twitter. The father of three teenagers, 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.