

## **Jenna Muma, Sophomore, Lincoln East High School**

While only a sophomore, Lincoln East's Jenna Muma has left an indelible mark on Nebraska distance running. In her two cross country seasons, her lowest finish in a Nebraska race is 6<sup>th</sup> place in the second race of her high school career. In the fifteen races since then, she's placed no lower than third, including 3<sup>rd</sup> place in Class A State as a freshman and 2<sup>nd</sup> as a sophomore.

Her track results are equally impressive. As a freshman, she won the all-class gold medal in the 1600 in 5:03, finished 3<sup>rd</sup> behind her sister Madi in the 800 in 2:19, was a member of the all-class 4x800 champion team, and finished her season with a 5:00.75 mile (converted 4:59.01 1600) at the Festival of Miles. This season, as of May 3, she has recorded top five marks in the 800, 1600 and 3200, including a state-leading 5:07 1600 at the HAC championships. Even though she's only run the 3200 once in her career, her mark of 11:16 is the third fastest in the state. Despite widely varying weather (including high winds), over a 21-day stretch in April she ran four 1600 races between 5:17 and 5:20.

So why is Jenna Muma so successful? You could blame Madi, a senior at Lincoln East. While Jenna realized in elementary school that she enjoyed the 800-meter jog she would occasionally have to do before recess, Madi was the first person to push her. When Jenna was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and Madi in 9<sup>th</sup>, Madi convinced Jenna to run with her and, at times, with East's summer runners. Not only was Jenna supposed to start the run with the girls, but Madi made it clear that that Jenna was supposed to stay with the varsity runners for the entire run. Madi's strategy – and Jenna's effort – has clearly paid off.

If you're going to be chasing your older sister, it's even better when you have a fast sister. Madi, a recent signee with the University of South Dakota, has overcome injuries and will wrap up her high school career this month. She's won the last two all-class gold medals in the 800, an all-class gold medal in the 4x800, and has earned State medals twice in the 1600 and in cross country. Her PRs of 2:13.22 and 5:02.48 are among the best of this year's competitors.

You could also blame Jenna's success on her parents and extended family. Her grandfather, Jay Muma, played basketball at Chadron State. Her father, Chad, was a two-time Class B triple jump state champion at Lexington, going over 46 feet in his final two years, and later competing for the University of Nebraska. Her mom, Kerri, played basketball at Doane, her aunt Becky Muma ran for UNK, and her uncle Mitch Muma played basketball at Peru State. The basketball gene hasn't completely gone away, with Jenna playing on the freshman and reserve basketball teams during her first two years at Lincoln East.

The family success hasn't stopped with Jenna. Her younger sister Kylie, who will enter Lincoln East next fall, was the fastest Nebraska girl at Nike regionals last fall, running an 18:37 to finish second in the open division. She also ran a 5:14 1600 as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader. The 2019 freshman class will also include Berlyn Schutz, whose older sister Ani will be a senior next fall. Berlyn ran a 5:08 1600 as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, a 5:10 indoors this February and an 18:52 at Nike regionals last fall.

However, if we're really going to blame someone for Jenna's success, it probably ought to be Jenna. She loves running because she is driven to set goals and then surpass them. She likes the feeling of pushing herself to the limit, to challenge herself to see how much better she can become. While Jenna has been

performing at a high level for her entire high school career, she believes that the consistent training during her summers has led to predictable and stronger results. She preaches consistency and persistence to younger runners who want to improve: “Stick with it even if you don’t think it’s possible.”

From my perspective, Jenna has been given three exceptional gifts – (a) a strong helping of talent, work ethic and competitiveness, (b) an older sister and a large number of talented teammates (Schutz, Schmidt, Searcey, Volkmer, etc.) who push each other in practice and races to improve, and (c) a supportive and nurturing environment created by her coaches, teammates and parents.

Has Nebraska girls distance running ever been so exciting? With so many strong programs in the state - Lincoln East, Lincoln Southwest, Papio South, Kearney, Fremont and others – the next few weeks hold great promise. Be sure to pay attention – these races aren’t going to last long.



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