

Lindsey Blehm, Junior, Lincoln Southwest High School

Lindsey Blehm is a planner, in part because her busy life requires it. She's an all-state viola player, carries a difficult class load to prepare her for a structural engineering program in college, and then there's her running gig. After a successful District meet this past Friday, her schedule gets a little easier this week. She's qualified for the State track meet in the 800, 1600 and 3200, so for the fourth time this season, she'll be running all three events in the same meet. In addition, she was also a member of the Districts-winning 4x400 relay team, so she's likely to run a fourth event at State. However, with the events spread over two days instead of six hours – and with running the only item on her agenda – this Friday and Saturday might be her most relaxing weekend in months.

Haven't heard of Lindsey Blehm? She's a junior at Lincoln Southwest, and she's one of the rising stars in Nebraska high school distance running. Despite her busy race schedule, entering Districts she was ranked 1st in the 800 (2:19.3), 3rd in the 1600 (5:13.8) and 3rd in the 3200 (11:16.4). While she doesn't win every race, she's fared well against many of the best runners in the state – Kaylie Crews, Olivia Rosenthal, the Muma sisters, Hannah Godwin, Ellie Dahl and others. A tenacious runner with a surprisingly strong kick, she's won a half dozen races this season against top competitors by a second or less. During a season where freshmen and sophomores are excelling, elder stateswomen Lindsey and Hannah Ray of Lincoln Northeast were the only juniors (there are no seniors) ranked in the top 5 of the three distance races prior to Districts.

Lindsey's running career started early, first with running club in elementary school and then with the Lincoln Community Track Club beginning in 4th grade. She had older cousins who ran and encouraged her to do the same, and it's always been something she's loved to do. Over the years, she tried other sports like basketball, but with her slight build she never enjoyed contact sports. She considers herself to be exceptionally competitive, and she likes that distance running continually gives her the opportunity to improve her times and measure herself against other runners.

Lindsey has posted strong marks since her freshman year, but she's also shown a consistent pattern of improvement. She placed 31st in the State cross country meet as a freshman, and the following spring recorded PRs of 5:30 and 11:39, with her 3200 PR notching her a 12th place finish at State. She wanted more, so she invested in more miles over the summer. Her sophomore season was exceptional, culminating in an 8th place finish at State XC, 6th in the 1600 (5:11) and 4th in the 3200 (11:19). Despite all of that success, Lindsey didn't fully understand her potential until she ran the 5:12 1600 that spring at the HAC championships, just edging Madi Muma. After that race, she realized that she could compete with the best runners in the state.

She increased her mileage again last summer, averaging about 30 miles per week but reaching as many as 40 miles. She has had a consistent weight training program during the past two off-seasons, plus maintenance work during the season, and she credits it for much of her improvement. She also works with bands to improve hip strength, and her team will occasionally perform yoga stretches on recovery days. The extra effort all summer resulted in a 5th place finish at last fall's State cross country meet,

where she finished behind Kaylie Crews, Jenna Muma, Ellie Dahl and Hannah Godwin – all of whom are also expected to perform well at this week’s State track meet.

Like all of the Lincoln Southwest runners, Lindsey gives considerable credit for her success to her coaches. XC coach Ryan Salem and head track coach Brett Schuster have fed her big dreams since she joined the team, even though she didn’t initially believe they could happen. Salem, Schuster and several other LSW coaches had successful collegiate distance running careers, and they have been able to translate their personal success to their athletes. They place a particular emphasis on the mental side of running, and Lindsey understands that focus and perseverance can be just as important as a strong kick.

Despite her competitiveness, Lindsey counts many of her competitors as friends. She values the friendliness of distance runners, and she appreciates the high bar that programs like Lincoln East and Fremont have established for Nebraska distance running the past few years. Once this season ends, she’ll start investigating engineering programs in and around Nebraska, so it’s likely that a few of her former opponents will become teammates. Before she completes high school, she’d like to run a sub-5:00 1600 and break Lincoln Southwest’s 3200 school record of 11:07. Given her success thus far, it seems likely that she’ll have time to fit these two accomplishments into her busy schedule.

*Jay Slagle is a volunteer writer for the Nebraska Elite TC website www.nebraskaelitetc.org. He posts Nebraska high school 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. His article about Noah Lambrecht, *The Runner with the Broken Heart*, has been viewed over 200,000 times and is available at <https://www.nebraskaelitetc.org/single-post/2018/10/07/NoahLambrecht>. He’s a sucker for a good story, so e-mail him at jay@jayslagle.com if you’ve got one. He has written two children’s books available for sale on Amazon. Visit www.jayslagle.com for more information.*