

## **Lincoln Southwest's dynamic distance trio**

In just over a week, many observers expect the Nebraska boys state track title will be determined by distance runners. While all of the main contenders – Fremont, Creighton Prep, Lincoln Southwest, Lincoln High and Omaha North – have strengths in other disciplines, the first three schools may have to rely heavily on their distance corps to push them to the podium.

Fremont feature seniors Wes Ferguson (ranked 1<sup>st</sup> this season in the 400 and 800) and Jose Gonzalez (2<sup>nd</sup> in in the 1600 and 3200). Ferguson is the returning all-class gold medalist in the 800 (1:55.8), while Gonzalez hopes to add his first individual goal medal to a storied high school career that already includes six individual state XC and T&F medals. Creighton Prep counters with Grant West (2<sup>nd</sup> in the 800, 1<sup>st</sup> in the 1600 and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 3200), Leo Burns (3<sup>rd</sup> in the 800), Michael Buckley (6<sup>th</sup> in the 1600) and Luke Dickas (10<sup>th</sup> in the 1600). Prep is the two-time defending champion in the 4x800 relay, but its senior-heavy distance group will need also to make their mark in individual races to be successful in the point standings.

Lincoln Southwest finds its strength in a trio of juniors who have already made their mark in high school distance running: Tyler Boyle, Jack Nolley and Trevor Action. Each of the three teammates has medaled at both State cross country and State track meets, including individual medals for each of them at last year's State track meet. However, the boys have had more than their share of health problems, and this year's meet may be the first time that they are all completely healthy at the same time. That could spell trouble for their opponents.

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When he was just six, Tyler Boyle began running fun runs with his dad (Rick, a 4:21 miler at Emporia State), and he joined the Lincoln Youth Track Club in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He didn't waste much time as a freshman, becoming the first 9<sup>th</sup> grader to win the LPS City Championships since 1984, and he also placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the highly-competitive UNK meet. He finished 19<sup>th</sup> in State cross country, played freshman and JV basketball over the winter, and then ran 1600 and 3200 bests of 4:38 and 9:48, respectively, during the track season.

His sophomore season also started well, and I vividly recall him racing step-for-step with Ryan Eastman and Jack Slagle for over 2.5 miles on a warm day at the Millard South meet, only to falter in the last 600 meters due to an asthma attack. After experiencing a series of poor results in subsequent races, Tyler was eventually diagnosed with a severe iron deficiency. When his doctors struggled to stabilize his iron levels, Tyler was directed to stop exercising for seven weeks after the season so his body could reset. It was definitely the low point of his running career, but his trajectory has been consistently upward since his recovery.

With depleted mileage heading into last spring, Tyler was still rebuilding his base when he finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the State 3200 (9:52) and 9<sup>th</sup> in the 1600 (4:30). However, he was full strength in cross country last fall, when he finished 4<sup>th</sup> at State behind Liem Chot, Ethan Goldner and Jose Gonzalez. He's performed well all of this track season, recording bests of 4:30 (9<sup>th</sup> on the charts) and 9:40 (5<sup>th</sup>).

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Jack Nolley discovered his love of running a bit later than Tyler. He played football, basketball and baseball in elementary school and middle school, occasionally taking part in community fun runs. During 1<sup>st</sup> grade, he remembers finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Pumpkin Run behind a kid named Tyler Boyle. Jack was planning to play football in high school, but Parker Schoen, his middle school English teacher, convinced him cross country was the better route. By that point, older brother Luke Nolley (now running at Air Force) had already been successful in LSW's distance program, and so it didn't take much urging from Mr. Schoen to convince Jack. Mr. Schoen may have had an ulterior motive to push Jack towards distance running; he's also an assistant distance coach for LSW.

Once at LSW, Jack earned a varsity XC spot early on and was a solid contributor, finishing 50<sup>th</sup> at State. In the spring, he recorded solid times of 4:33 and 10:04, and qualified for State in the 1600. His sophomore season (and Luke's senior year) was even more charmed, highlighted by 15<sup>th</sup> place at State XC, a runner-up finish for LSW, 6<sup>th</sup> place in the 4x800 and 2<sup>nd</sup> place behind Ryan Eastman in the 1600 (4:21). During the season he also lowered his 800 PR to 1:56.07, an event where he finished 10<sup>th</sup> at State. Like nearly all high-level runners, he dedicated summer before his junior year to improving even more, running 50-60 miles per week.

Unfortunately, the increase in mileage led to a stress fracture in his tibia. His season was shut down three meets into the season, and he spent four weeks on crutches and he didn't resume light running until January. He guessed it would take him 5-6 months to get back to racing shape so, by those expectations, he's already ahead of schedule. He's now running 30-35 miles per week (nearly all centered around intervals), often biking instead of taking recovery runs, and he's continued to aqua-jog to keep a balance between fitness and pavement-pounding. His rehab program seems to be working well; his four 1600 races this season have ranged from 4:32 to 4:37, and his last five 800's have all been sub-2:00 despite high winds at several of the meets.

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Trevor Acton had no intentions of being a competitive runner. He played club soccer from 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and only went out for cross country as a freshman to get in shape for spring soccer and to stop Mr. Schoen from bugging him. Despite being a novice runner, he kept his varsity spot the entire year, usually finishing as the 7<sup>th</sup> runner on the team but improving to 5<sup>th</sup> at the State meet. By the end of the season, he realized he enjoyed his teammates too much to join the soccer team in the spring. He hit his growth spurt later in the fall, and his spring bests were 5:04 and 10:07.

With the growth spurt and soccer career behind him, Trevor put a greater emphasis on summer mileage, and it paid off in spades as a sophomore. He finished 17<sup>th</sup> at the State XC meet as the 4<sup>th</sup> LSW runner when LSW captured the runner-up trophy. He continued his improvement into the spring, recording PRs of 4:41 and 9:41, ending with a 7<sup>th</sup> place finish in the State 3200.

Trevor increased his mileage again last summer, consistently running 40-50 miles per week. LSW has a vibrant summer conditioning program, with anywhere from 50-100 runners meeting at the LSW flagpole

on weekdays at 7:00 a.m. Mentoring younger runners is a key emphasis within the LSW program, and on the boys' easy days, up to 20 of LSW's fastest boys will run as a pack. Trevor gives great credit to Luke Nolley, Mason Louviere and other upperclassmen for helping and encouraging him during and after these types of training runs.

Trevor's success continued into the fall of his junior year, where he finished 5<sup>th</sup> at State XC. However, his winter training was interrupted by what at first he thought was a sprained ankle, but later diagnosed as a likely stress reaction in his tibia. At the start of this track season, he was running just two miles per day. Since last winter, he has been supplementing his runs with aqua-jogging, weightlifting and the stationery bike. He typically skips recovery runs, which has kept him under 30 miles per week. Despite the lower mileage, his bests this season are 4:38 and 9:47.

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LSW has a rich distance running tradition, in large part due to the depth of their coaching staffing. Head track coach Brett Schuster was a middle-distance standout at Beatrice High School, earning four medals at the 2004 State meet in the 400, 800, 4x400 and 4x800. Assistant Coach Parker Schoen was the Class A State XC champion as a junior in 2008, placed 3<sup>rd</sup> as a senior, and ran at UNL and Nebraska Wesleyan. Head XC coach Ryan Salem earned two XC team titles at Lincoln Southeast and was an XC All-American at Nebraska Wesleyan in 1997. Assistant coach Marissa Moore was a 7-time All-American middle distance runner at Doane. Assistant coach Matt James worked as a student manager with the UNL cross country and track teams while studying at UNL.

All three runners emphatically credit the LSW coaching staff for their success. In addition to calibrating workouts to keep them challenged and improving, the LSW staff place a high emphasis on goal setting, accountability, personal values and leadership development. High-level distance runners of any age constantly face the risk of overuse injuries, and Jack and Trevor were particularly complimentary of how their coaches helped identify and rehab their injuries.

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One of the goals of our articles on distance runners is to provide younger athletes with advice on how to succeed. Tyler believes that consistency – in workouts, weightlifting and nutrition – is the key to year-to-year improvement. Trevor always tries to always focus on the future, knowing that runners often make the mistake of letting a few bad races define them. Jack preaches giving your best effort on workout days even when you don't feel your best. However, his second bit of advice may be the best I've heard all year: "always bring toilet paper to a race because you never know if the bathroom will have it."

With that final detail, it's clear that the LSW distance team is prepared for State.



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