

## **Gabby McGinn, Junior, Millard West High School**

If your knowledge of high school runners is limited to simply seeing who wins each week, you might not have noticed Gabby McGinn's progress the past two years. However, the junior from Millard West has made a steady climb in the rankings. With Districts just a few days away, Gabby owns the fastest 1600 and the second-fastest 3200 in Nebraska, and she appears poised to improve upon those marks.

Gabby's high school running career did not start quickly. Her primary sport was swimming, and she had also dabbled in soccer, tennis and gymnastics during elementary school. While she ran for her middle school team and briefly for the Omaha Racers, the running bug didn't bite her very hard, so she did not go out for cross country during her freshman year. However, her middle school coach Scott Haug always told her to 'keep running,' so she returned to the track as a freshman.

Despite not having any winter miles due to her time in the pool, Gabby had a strong freshman year, with bests of 2:25 (800) and 5:42 (1600). She was a model of consistency in cross country during her sophomore year, often running times near 20:30 before finishing the season with several sub-20:00 efforts, including a 19:49 that earned her 10<sup>th</sup> place at State and helped Millard West take the runner-up plaque. After another winter of swimming, Gabby gradually cut down her times during her sophomore track season, setting PRs at State in the 1600 (5:09) and 3200 (11::11) to finish fourth in each event. Her relay team also earned a 7<sup>th</sup> place medal in the 4x800, and Millard West placed third in the team standings, just 8.5 points behind Kearney.

Gabby had high expectations for the cross country season last fall. While nearly all of her results were under 20:00, she battled a hip injury beginning in the summer and she was not in her best form at State. She had hoped to compete for the title but finished 6<sup>th</sup>, but still played a key role in Millard West's first team championship since 2011. This past winter Gabby made the difficult decision to give up swimming and focus on running, and it has paid dividends. This spring she's run consistently under 5:20 and 11:20, and she has improved her PRs to 5:06 and 11:06. She would like to finish in the top 2 at State in each event, and would like to be near 5:00 and below 11:00.

Gabby comes from a swimming family, but her older sisters began running after high school. While she realized in 7<sup>th</sup> grade that she could be good at running, she continued to swim until this year when she realized she had more potential as a runner. She ran 35-45 miles per week last summer when healthy, and she ran 20-30 miles per week this past winter. During track season she's averaged about 35 miles per week. Typical track workouts include 400 repeats on a 2:30 running clock, mile repeats and two-mile tempo runs.

Colin Johnston, Gabby's cross country coach, describes her as "one of the toughest competitors, male or female, that I have had the privilege to coach," and Coach Johnson has coached phenomenal runners at Millard West. "She is fearless and does not settle when it comes to racing; she constantly pushes herself to do the best she can," he added. Gabby's work ethic and attention to detail carry over to her academics, and Gabby hopes to study science or medicine in college.

Gabby would also like to run for a college team, but she's got some big things to accomplish before she wraps up her high school career next spring. Since the majority of this season's top 10 performers in the

1600 and 3200 are underclassmen, Gabby's path to an individual state championship will not be easy. However, those competitors only motivate Gabby to work harder, and Gabby had already shown that her hard work leads to exceptional results.

*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](http://www.jayslagle.com) for more information.*