

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Consistency, community and courage help rekindle love of running

BY JENNIFER HIGGINS
Special to the Daily Sun

I fell in love with running on a mucky cross country course in Ireland.

For an individual sport, it is notable how many of my early memories are filled with shared experiences: rainy chat-filled miles, bus trips of laughter, turning race mud splatters into face paint and persevering through tough races knowing every point mattered for our team performance. To this day, the satisfaction I still feel from progressing as a non-scorer to eventually leading our team remains one of my greatest reminders of the power of consistency

and courage.

My next few years were filled with challenging lessons of physical and emotional resilience through injury. By fall of 2021, I wasn't sure what my future with running was. Pain-free miles became my measure of success, and it often felt like I was failing. I decided to make a massive life change and move to Flagstaff with just two suitcases, 10 days of accommodation and a dream of rekindling a positive relationship with running. It seemed crazy to some people, but it felt right to me.

When I first moved to Flagstaff, I heard about the community running group Team Run

Flagstaff (TRF) and its weekly track workouts, but it seemed a bit intimidating to me — and I kept my distance from what I thought would be a competitive and pressure-filled environment. But in early summer 2023, I found myself walking the outside lanes of TRF practice at Coconino High School with the now editor of this column and her sleeping newborn. We were as welcome walking as the crew clipping off sub-5-minute mile pace at the front end. Those few weeks of walking and witnessing TRF practice from the outside lanes planted the seed that track workouts might be significantly less scary than I believed, and

maybe even fun.

A couple of months later, I found myself being led through a series of running drills by the TRF coaches before hearing the now familiar – “3, 2, 1, hit it!” as around 100 runners and walkers embarked on a time-based workout. On the sporadically snowy spring evenings, when we’ve moved back outside after our winter sessions in the indoor track of NAU’s Walk-up Skydome, the TRF coaches talk about consistency — the value of showing up week after week — the same lesson I learned as a teenager back in Ireland.

But what I’ve learned over the past few years is that the value of consistency applies to so

much more than just fitness. Consistency builds community — on and off the track. In consistency you might even find courage, the courage to stand on a start line once more and embrace competition — whether that is early in the morning on July Fourth for the Downtown Mile or a track meet or really anything that feels daunting.

I’m grateful that something that once felt daunting (for me, TRF practices) quickly became a consistent community that I fell in love with, only because I had the courage to join.

As my next chapter of life just began with another big move across

the Atlantic Ocean, I find myself longing for the Tuesday evening time calls and encouragement from the TRF coaches. But even in that longing, I’ll smile and look forward to one day hearing that encouraging “3, 2, 1, hit it!” when I return to my favorite Flagstaff community once again.

Jennifer Higgins is an Irish physiologist who came to Flagstaff to pursue professional experience and recently left with rekindled joy for running and pieces of her heart left in this special mountain town.

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SOFTBALL

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two innings to force the game to extras.

With two outs in the fifth, Martin walked and stole second before scoring on a single to center off the bat of Salas Saucedo. Salas Saucedo came around to score herself during Chase’s at-bat, leaving Flagstaff trailing 12-10 after five innings. Walks by Willetto and Zamora-Gilmer set up Angalisia Vallejos to bring in a run on a single before Madison Smith tied the game with another single two pitches later.

Flagstaff had two runners in scoring position with one out in the sixth, looking for the walk-off victory, but a double play that included an out at the plate kept the game alive for Silver Creek, which put

up five runs to open the seventh inning.

Looking to rally again, Flagstaff struck immediately as Brielle Smith scored the runner placed at second in extras, and Salas Saucedo doubled to bring in two runs two batters later. After Salas Saucedo came home to score on a steal of home with one out, Silver Creek erased the game-tying run at home as Martinez walked, stole second and was caught trying to steal home.

Salas Saucedo finished the game 4 for 4, scored four runs and drove in four more, with Martin also scoring four times while going 3 for 4 at the plate. Every player in Flagstaff’s lineup recorded a hit, with Brielle Smith, Chase and Zamora-Gilmer also recording multi-hit games.

RENOVATIONS

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via income tax.

“While it gives the D-backs over \$20 million dollars, it also provides contracts and necessities for unions,” Rep. Mariana Sandoval said.

While the bill was multilayered, its most high-profile inclusion was providing necessary renovations to Chase Field.

The bill set a \$500 million cap for renovations.

Concerns about the retractable roof at Chase Field, which has housed the Diamondbacks since 1998, have prevailed. The team has begun to address some issues, including a leaky roof.

The stadium will now undergo more renovations via a bill that will

help maintain its status as a modern MLB ballpark.

Stability is no certainty in professional sports anymore. Just ask fans of MLB’s Athletics. They saw their team recently relocate to Sacramento, with an eventual destination of Las Vegas.

“As an A’s fan, I have kept a close eye on this situation, because no one else should have to go through what we went through,” Phoenix resident Ron Campbell said. “I’m really glad they were able to come to a deal for the renovations, because that provides me with some baseball to watch.”

Although inconsistency has defined the Diamondbacks’ play this season, this news surely falls in the win column.

BASEBALL

FROM PAGE 1

drove him in with an RBI single past a diving third baseman. Flagstaff again worked the bases loaded as it looked to mount a rally, but Payson ended the game on a fly ball to center.

Payson followed Wednesday’s victory against Flagstaff with another win, beating Mountain Pines Little League on Thursday to reach the tournament’s championship round. A loss to Mountain Pines dropped Winslow into the losers’ bracket, facing Flagstaff to stay alive on Thursday night.

However, Flagstaff avenged its opening-round loss from Wednesday by making quick work of Winslow, 16-1, in four innings to stay alive in District 1.

After Winslow drove in its first and only run to start the game, Flagstaff’s pitching was lights-out. Crockett and Manny split the game with two innings apiece. They each had four strikeouts on two hits and one walk allowed. The two also faced nine batters apiece.

Flagstaff registered six base hits in the ball game all registered by six different players. The team scored multiple runs in all four innings at the plate.

Flagstaff blew the gates wide open with a seven-run bottom of the first. Stress tied the game at one apiece with an RBI single into center field to bring in Blecha from third. Flagstaff tacked on a few more runs in the first inning with passed balls and an RBI base hit into right field by Martin. Jayden Hunt would ultimately drive Martin home on a grounder to short.

Boeck finished off the first-inning frenzy with a double to center field to bring Hunt to home plate from second base.

The Flagstaff Juniors added to the run total with two runs scored on wild pitches in the second inning. Bases-loaded walks by Ryder Ziegler and Nathanael Williams represented the scoring in the third.

Orrin Cloer got Flagstaff to within one run from ending the game with a line-drive single to center, driving in two base runners. Manny ended the game with a bases-loaded walk that scored Crockett.

Flagstaff advanced to play the Mountain Pines — which lost to Payson, 8-5, on Thursday — at 5 p.m. on Friday for a

spot in the championship round.

10s baseball

The visiting Flagstaff Little League 10s All-Stars team dominated its opening-round matchup Thursday evening with a 26-0 victory over host Winslow Little League at Keaton Field. Flagstaff mustered 21 hits and put the game out of reach with a 15-run fourth inning.

The 15-run final inning saw a stretch of runs scored in five straight plays. Tyler Schmidt notably hit a towering fly ball over the left fielder for an RBI triple amid the scoring streak as part of a 3-for-3 performance at the plate. Ezra Johnson did the same with the bases loaded for a three-RBI triple to score Chance Ragan, Jacob Almendarez and Wyatt Anderson.

Felix Garcia put the finishing touches on the 26-run rout with a line drive to left to score Johnson.

Josiah Craver and Hayden Day split time on the mound, combining for nine strikeouts on just three hits and one walk. Day batted leadoff for Flagstaff and got the ball rolling with a walk and a couple of stolen bases. He tagged up from third on a sacrifice fly from Josiah Craver to take the lead in the first inning.

Hudson Bruce led the offensive onslaught with a 4-for-4 performance at the plate while also scoring three runs. Day went a perfect 2 for 2 with two walks.

Flagstaff pulled away with a nine-run second inning, including back-to-back scoring hits by Almendarez and Brayson Kenmore following a Winslow pitching change.

Anthony Medina helped bring in the lone Flagstaff run in the third inning on a fly ball that landed in center field. After seeing the ball land in the outfield, Bruce sprinted home from second base to grow Flagstaff’s lead to 11.

Flagstaff advanced to play Payson Friday evening. Host team Winslow will next play on Saturday in the losers bracket against the loser of Friday’s Flagstaff/Payson game.

11s baseball

After two days of the Arizona District 1 Tournament in Snowflake, the Flagstaff Little League 11s All-Stars team is halfway to reaching the state tournament. Following a 13-0 win



HATTIE LOPER, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

Flagstaff Little League Juniors’ Gage Stress (9) pitches during a district tournament game against Payson on Wednesday at Continental Park.

against Silver Creek Little League in 3 1/2 innings on Wednesday night, Flagstaff led from start to finish in a 7-2 victory against Winslow on Thursday night at Torey Lovullo Field.

Flagstaff jumped out to a 7-0 lead through three innings, with six different players accounting for the runs and 10 of the team’s 12 players reaching base safely.

Kingston Carrillo opened the bottom of the first inning with a double to left field and scored on a wild pitch two batters later for the game’s first run. Flagstaff added two more in the second inning, with Landon Brown’s double and Waylon Peak’s single driving in runs.

Seven consecutive batters reached base to open the third inning as Flagstaff tacked on four more runs. Cole Joralmon walked and Carrillo singled, setting up Bennett Burcar for an RBI double. Carrillo came home on a wild pitch with Ty Palmer at the plate, who scored Burcar from third with a single.

After Riley Bruce reached on a fielder’s choice, the first pitch to Boden Kirkman got away from Winslow’s catcher. A pair of wild throws to second base and third base allowed Bruce to come all the way in from first, putting Flagstaff up 7-0.

Backed by his offense scoring in each of the first three innings, Palmer struck out 12 batters and allowed just two base runners through four innings. After a walk, strikeout and single, Palmer departed the mound with 70 pitches and Tad Whitney entered the game. Winslow broke through for its only two runs of the game over the next two batters, scoring on a single and a passed ball. Whitney finished the game with three strikeouts in his 1 2/3 innings of work on the mound.

Behind Burcar’s dominance on the mound, Flagstaff beat Silver Creek 13-0 after 3 1/2 innings on Wednesday.

Flagstaff scored six runs in the first inning, with Burcar recording a one-out double and scoring on a single by Palmer. After Whitney was hit by a pitch, Bruce drove in two runs with a two-out double. Flagstaff had three more batters reach safely with two outs, beginning with a RBI single from Kirkman. After Brown reached on an error, Peak capped off the six-run inning with a two-run double.

After Vaughn Barber walked to open the second inning, Silver Creek retired the next two batters as it looked to escape before Flagstaff added to its lead. However, Burcar singled to right to bring home Barber before the team’s offense exploded for another six runs in the third.

Whitney walked to open the third, scoring one batter later on Barrett Jay’s single to left field and Brown drove in Kirkman as he reached safely on an error. Leading 9-0 with two outs in the inning, Flagstaff put together three singles and a walk through the next four batters to tack on four more runs. Brown was joined on base by Peak, with both scoring on passed balls during Tucker Callan’s at-bat. After Callan walked and advanced all the way up to third with Barber at the plate, a single pushed the score to 12-0. Joralmon finished off the game’s scoring with his own single after Barber had also advanced to second on a passed ball.

Burcar faced 13 batters, striking out 10 in 3 2/3 innings on the mound. Just two batters reached safely for Silver Creek, via an error in the first inning and on a single in the fourth inning. After Burcar departed with 50 pitches, Barber recorded the final out of the game on a groundout.

Flagstaff will now face Mountain Pines Little League at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday in Snowflake for a spot in the district championship round.



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