



The Friar Runner

A biannual newsletter about the Fenwick Girls' Running Program



The team posed for a Homecoming photo in September.

“The gang’s back together” is something that is often heard over the summer and especially the fall once 60 runners come together for the cross country season. That sense of gathering is full of excitement and anticipation for the season ahead. This year, the cross country season did not disappoint even though we had two meets canceled due to the weather. Our first meet of the season, the Hornet-Red Devil Invite at Katherine Legge was cancelled because the day was full of thunderstorms. In a symmetric fashion, the final meet of the regular season, the Sterling Invite, was also cancelled because the course was inundated.

Notwithstanding the limited racing opportunities, the Friars had a wonderful season led

by senior captains **Arlene Amaya, Amaya Gonzalez** and **Laura Durkin**. In terms of times, the Friars averaged a 2:19 drop from their first race of the season and the top 5 averaged an 18:46, which was the best average since 2014. Sophomore **Mary Jacobs** earned the largest personal record drop with a 2:28 decrease. The biggest in-season drop was 4:04, which came from freshman **Sonia Kuchinic**. It was fun watching Kuchinic, along with many of her peers who were new to high school running, learn to enjoy the sense of accomplishment that a cross country practice provides. The freshmen crew is full of eager, disciplined, mature and driven runners. They are already coming out of their shells, and it will be an enjoyable journey with them for the next three and a half years.

The program is always trying to encourage a love for the sport even beyond the 60 or so athletes that come out each season. This year the program supported positive experiences for both youth and adult runners. For the youth, over 300 grade schoolers took part in our inaugural middle school rust buster meet on August 25th at the Fenwick athletic fields of the River Forest Priory. For the adults, Coach Marks spearheaded volunteering for Girls on the Run's cheering tent at the Chicago Marathon. It was motivating to see the tens of thousands of everyday runners choosing to challenge themselves. To see professional runners like Mo Farah, Laura Thweatt, Galen Rupp, Jordan Hasay, and Amy Cragg effortlessly run by at mile 15 was also impressive. The highlight of the day, however, was watching our very own Coach Whitehead run by seemingly just as effortlessly clipping sub 6:50 miles. It was a fun moment as the team expressed overwhelming pride in their hard working coach.

As often is the case for the Friars, the breakout weekend was the final weekend in September where the team splits between Peoria and Niles West. Up at Niles West, **Grace Simmons, Teagan Drumm** and **Melissa McMahon** all dropped a minute from their previous races which was seemingly the theme that day; drop time. Down in Peoria, varsity continued to focus on pack running which allowed the first four (Durkin, **Maria Quinn**, Arlene Amaya, **Marie O'Brien**) to comfortably hit their goal of breaking 19. Durkin, fueled by her teammates, earned a PR of 18:17 making her the 7th fastest runner in Fenwick's history. That evening the team celebrated at Fenwick's homecoming and gathered for a team picture amidst the celebrations.

Conference and Post-Season

At Conference, the Friars had 13 runners earn awards which amounted to over one fifth of all awards given out. Given that the GCAC has 12 competing cross country teams, that is quite an accomplishment. In the JV race, **Alexa Haeflinger** was the overall winner with **Cara Conniff, Ewa Szeszko** and **Molly McCann** also earning medals placing 2nd overall as a team. In the F/S race, **Mia Scharpf, Delaney Seligmann, Maggie O'Malley** and **Abbie Rogowski** were the medal earners placing the Friars 3rd as a team. Going into the varsity race, everyone knew it was going to be a battle between Fenwick and Ignatius for the title. The Friars put up a great overall fight placing 2nd by just five points. O'Brien placed 2nd, Arlene Amaya placed 3rd, Quinn 6th, with Durkin and **Katie Cahill** also earning All-Conference honors. Despite the near miss of the championship, a great takeaway for the varsity was that they were each able to lead on the course as the finishing order for the first through fourth runners was flipped from Peoria. That, along

with their ability to perform at big stages like Conference or Peoria, instilled confidence that they would be ready to perform at Sectionals.

At Sectionals, it was quite clear that the 5th spot to State would be between Plainfield North and Fenwick. The Friars ran wonderfully putting their best foot forward that day. After the race, not yet knowing the score, the team gathered with pride about their performance. Regardless of the outcome, they were told to be proud of the months of what they call "the grind" that brought them to that point. After nervously awaiting for 45 minutes, the results were official. The Friars placed 6th, just 3 points behind Plainfield North. Durkin and O'Brien qualified individually for State, breaking up the quartet that also included Arlene and Quinn. The four literally finished one after the other at sectionals (and frankly, nearly every race). This was another heart-wrenching near miss.

After taking a moment to gather herself, I witnessed -- yet had trouble doing so because of the beautiful yet tragic nature of it -- Quinn sincerely congratulating the two with a big hug and a smile for them. When a reporter asked how they felt about qualifying, the qualifiers responded, "It doesn't feel right. This whole season we have raced together as a pack. The only reason that we race the way we do is because we are together." The girls set the intention of qualifying for State over 6 months earlier and committed fully to it. They were 'all in' forging indelible bonds during the process. After it all, one coach reflected that the proudest moment from the season was that morning: "seeing girls who should be in 2A be sad about not making it as a team in 3A." It was a beautiful pursuit.

After shaking off the weekend, the following week was a blast heading into state. A fun Halloween practice capped off the training with many of the teammates still running to ensure Durkin and O'Brien were ready to perform at State. The two made the most of their opportunity at Detweiller representing the Friars proudly. Durkin ran her second best 3-mile time and Marie PR'ed to an 18:42.

The 2018 season will be proudly remembered. Bus sing-alongs, LemonAid stand, rainy day riddles, broken down cars, scavenger hunt in PJs and an NXR trip are just some of the other wonderful memories interspersed among the hard work and dedication that came from the summer and fall of 2018. This reflection was written with a profound gratitude for the 60 runners who committed to the program and the fond memories that came from it and it is with that same profundity we are hopeful towards track.

Friar Caritas

The below story is pulled from a reflection written by two senior runners:

It is cross country conference. The open race begins and Fenwick senior, **Alex Medina**, has an impressive start to her last race. She fearlessly leads the entire race of 300 girls around the first loop. As the adrenaline wears off, she falls back in the pack but still continues at a pace that will earn her a personal best The race is almost over and the top runners start approaching the finish line. As Medina turns the corner bounding toward the finish line, my heart swells; this could be a personal record for one of my best friends at her final race. Junior, **Olivia Rill**, is leaning over in pain trying to

get to the end, but freezes 100 meters from the finish. Medina sees Rill struggling, and, forgetting that she could achieve a personal accomplishment, reaches out her hand to Olivia, physically surging her teammate forward and into the race. As they cross the finish line, Medina runs her season best, followed by Rill who earned her lifetime best by just 5 seconds. The moment had touched the crowd each individually and we stood awestruck in the selfless act of love we had just witnessed.

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