

Brandy Kent, Senior, Millard South High School

I don't believe you have to be better than everyone else. I believe you have to be better than you ever thought you could be. 2/24/19

Social media isn't always a blessing. Recent studies have found that it can lead to an increase in depression, anxiety, cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FOMO) and unrealistic expectations since it seems like everyone on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram has a better life than us.

But then there are people on social media like Brandy Kent, a senior at Millard South High School. As a writer covering Nebraska high school running, I spend most of my limited time on Twitter looking for running-related topics and news. During 2018, repeatedly stumbled across a post or re-tweet by @Kentbestopped that caught my eye. Always positive and often inspirational, Brandy alternated her tweets between her love for running and her love for friends.

I've only met Brandy twice. The first time, right after the 2018 Nebraska Cross Country Festival, she gave me a thank you card. "Thanks for everything you do for high school running," she wrote. "I really appreciate you."

Look for something positive in each day, even if some days you have to look a little harder. 12/30/18

Brandy discovered distance running later than most of us, which may be why she's trying to squeeze four years of high school running memories into two years. She's always loved sports for the physical challenge and how it allows her to make friends without really trying. She's played soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis, swimming and bowling, often as a member of the Millard South Unified teams. However, most of those sports weren't good fits for her; Brandy says you can tell whether she liked the sport by looking at the end-of-season team picture. If she was frowning, it just wasn't her thing.

As she continued her search for a sport she could claim as her own, she joined the track team as a sophomore. She participated in the 100 meters and long jump, but that wasn't her thing either. She didn't experience a runner's high or much camaraderie. Her friend Sara Putnam encouraged Brandy to try cross country the following fall.

Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength. 2/3/19

Everything clicked that first season of cross country during her junior year. She wasn't fast enough for a spot on varsity but she improved throughout the season. She ran just over 32:00 in her first meet in Seward, and she dropped that time to 27:10 by the end of the year. More importantly, she embraced the freedom that running gave her. She ran through streets in Millard she'd never seen, she took bus rides where she developed friendships, and she discovered that running reduced her stress levels.

With cross country, Brandy had found the elusive runner's high. While a good run might leave her exhausted, it also helped her solve problems. Her mother, Terri Kent, observes that running has boosted Brandy's confidence, improved her self-image and raised her grades – "it's the most amazing transformation I've ever seen."

Good luck to the Millard South athletes competing today at the Millard North Relays. I know you will all do amazing! 3/23/19

Distance running is often an individual pursuit. There's no one on the track or course to pick you up, give you a rest, or relieve your burden. And yet somehow Brandy's running experience has everything to do with her teammates. Coach Dave Samler, who ran many training runs with Brandy, noted that, "There are few students that can contribute the joy, love, hard work, faithfulness and citizenship in a greater way than Brandy. She was every teammate's biggest cheerleader and fan. She just loves God and loves people, in a way we were all designed and desire, but few of us reach the level of love and acceptance that Brandy has found."

Coach Jordan Fugelstad, Brandy's cross country coach in her senior year, added, "She is the ultimate teammate. She will always cheer on every teammate even if she doesn't know them well, because she always places the team over herself. She volunteers to do everything that the team is asked to do."

Believe in yourself. You are braver than you think, more talented than you know, and capable of more than you can imagine. 3/3/19

I know people who love running because they're really good at running. They win races, earn medals, bask in the limelight. It's easy to love something that gives so much back.

Running has never been like that for Brandy. She's never medaled in a high school cross country meet. She doesn't measure success in medals, but she does measure in PRs. Over a 14-month period, she dropped her 5k time from 32:00 to 25:50. At the end of her junior XC season, her 1600 PR was just over 9:00. Track coach Brett Friesen gave Brandy a stiff goal: break 7:00 by the end of the following April and she would earn a spot on Millard South's District team.

Coach Friesen says, "The best part about Brandy is that she always has a smile on her face. The smile got a little smaller as she pushed herself hard, but it's always there even when she has a bad run." Her determination paid off. She ran a 6:50 1600 near the end of the season to earn the District spot.

I want to wish a happy birthday to my sweet, funny, supportive, amazing dad. He has been through so much lately with being at the hospital and having so many doctor visits, but he is resilient and strong. I love you so much, Dad, and I hope you have an amazing fun filled day. 11/8/18

Brandy loves her family, including two younger sisters. Despite not feeling well, her dad Jerry came to Papio South to watch her run one of her last cross country meets. She ran a PR and he was thrilled. "You would have been first place if the race had been longer," he gushed to her. He had pushed her to go out for cross country, and he was thrilled that she had fell in love with the sport

Jerry passed away on November 27 at age 52. Brandy has dedicated her final track season to him. Not just the races, but all of her training runs. His name was on her wrist when she ran a 6:32 in the first meet of the season. He'll be there to help her towards her biggest goal yet, to break 6:00.

Everyone wants happiness. No one wants pain. But you can't have a rainbow without a little rain. 2/17/19

Brandy Kent has a lot of love to give. She loves her coaches – Friesen, Samler, Fugelstad, Llewellyn and others. She loves tempo runs. Koda, the dog her family adopted a few months ago to help all of them heal. Her teammates and her fellow campers from Colorado running camp. Meeting new people. Improving. She loves running as much as anyone I know, so much so that she probably injured herself by running too much this past winter. She even loves failing, because playing it safe isn't going to make you better.

The will to win, the desire to success, the urge to reach your full potential... these are the keys that will unlock the door to your personal experience. 3/25/19

There are five weeks left in Brandy Kent's high school running career. She plans to attend Metro Community College next year, and she'll probably join a running club. She'll definitely keep running, and she'll smile on every run. Once you find something you love this much, you never let it go.



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](https://twitter.com/preprunningnerd) on Twitter. The father of three teenagers, Jay is a self-professed running nerd who was never good at running. 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.