

Ally Schilmoeller, Junior, Elkhorn South High School

Stick with distance running long enough and you'll figure out that failure is hard to separate from success. Runners train to improve, but training too much risks injury. Runners race to exhaustion, hoping to expend their last bit of energy crossing the finish line. Many races and hard workouts, particularly when runners don't feel their best, are a test of an athlete's physical and mental commitment to be better. These challenges aren't exclusive to distance running but it's an experience that many non-athletes – adults or students – may not even have once a year.

Every distance runner has a failure story. They rarely define a runner, but they often motivate them for years to come. Ally Schilmoeller, a junior at Elkhorn South High School, has her story. After medaling in every cross country meet as a freshman, she was a favorite to medal at the State meet. Ally had been fighting an illness all week before State – but it was more of an annoyance than anything. She was as surprised as anyone when, with a State medal within her sight, she collapsed one hundred meters short of the finish line. After the last runner went by, she was helped to her feet.

She's not the first runner to fall short of the State finish line, but that is just the start of her story.

Ally has been running since elementary school but she didn't begin competitive running until high school. She first ran with the 'Girls on the Run' program and then through the elementary and junior high running programs organized by Tim Ebers, Elkhorn South's head cross country coach. However, she rarely trained outside of practices, instead devoting most of her sports time to club soccer. She still considered soccer her primary sport when she joined the cross country team as a freshman. However, her early success and some good-natured badgering by upperclassmen Macie Moore (now running at Morningside) and Emily Johnson (UNO) convinced her to give up soccer that fall.

Despite her disappointment as a freshman, Ally has found great success at State meets. As a freshman, her team placed eighth in the Class A 4 x 800 meter relay, and she placed 15th in the Class A 1600 with a 5:24. As a sophomore, she won most of her early cross country races and then placed third in the Class B State meet behind Mazie Larsen (Baylor) and Kaylee Bentley (Wyoming). The following spring, she placed fifth in the Class A 3200 in 11:20 and set a PR of 5:21 in the 1600 while finishing 13th. This fall will be Ally's first year to compete in Class A in cross country, but Ally thinks the increased competition will help her improve. Thus far in fall 2018, she's medaled at all of her meets and has won two of them.

Ally enjoys the team component of cross country and track and field, but she's also enjoyed befriending runners from other schools like Taya Skelton of Fort Calhoun and Mazie Larsen. Ally attended the Nebraska Elite summer camp in 2018, and she stays in touch with her fellow campers.

Ally has just over two years of competitive training, and Coach Ebers has been slowly increasing her mileage. She ran approximately 200 miles this summer and 22-25 miles per week thus far this season. Her toughest workouts are 1600- and 1000-meter repeats. She occasionally bikes as cross-training, attends yoga sessions on weekends, and pays particular attention to core strength and hip flexibility to reduce her risk of injury.

She is aware that her biggest challenge is the mental side of running. Ally believes her coach always has her well-prepared for critical meets, but it can be difficult to stay positive and work through the pain on tough days. She wants to get better, and Coach Ebers does a good job of pushing her beyond her expectations. He'll often challenge her with stretch goals during her hardest workouts.

In addition to running, Ally is active in the school newspaper and the FCCLA leadership club. Since late last spring, she's been focused on accumulating 100 service hours to meet an eligibility requirement for Elkhorn South's chapter of the National Honor Society. She's particularly enjoyed participating in mission trips and volunteering at the Open Door Mission.

Ally would like to compete in college but understands that she'll need to cut her times to achieve her goal of competing in Division 1. She would like to improve her 19:20 5k PR to less than 18:30, her 1600 to 5:05 and her 3200 to under 11:00. Her long-term goal is to become a pediatrician, so she's looking for a strong science program. Her early wish list includes Baylor and Creighton, but as a junior she has plenty of time to consider her options.

In advance of a race, Ally likes to have the same pre-race dinner and breakfast. She also breaks out her lucky socks. While I've only spent an hour with her, I think she can forego the lucky socks. With her intelligence, work ethic and giving heart, Ally seems destined for success in life and running.

Jay Slagle is a volunteer writer for the Nebraska Elite TC website who posts race pictures at www.facebook.com/preprunningnerd and race results at @preprunningnerd on Twitter. The father of three teenagers, 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 for more information.