

Coach's Corner for June/July 2014: Meet Your 2014 Scholarship Winners

What a terrific double quartet of young people! This year's scholarship recipients, five boys and three girls, represented five local high schools. One of our winners was the third member of his family to receive a scholarship and another was the second member of her family to also earn that honor. Their individual accomplishments are most impressive. One was a class valedictorian, earning nothing but A's in four years of high school; two were state champions in track or cross country and four are in the Southern Nevada Cross Country Legends Hall of Fame. All eight had impressive academic records and involvement in community activities. In fact, there are so many good things to say about them that I've decided to spread it out over two newsletters, four this month and four next time. I'll introduce you to them alphabetically, starting with Sara Dort.

Sara Dort graduated from Coronado High School with a weighted GPA of 4.5 (out of 4.8), and a class rank of 77/675. One of her recommending teachers, who also happens to be her cross country coach, had this to say about Sara:

Sara is a complete student. She is extremely dedicated to her studies but also finds time for extracurricular activities.... She is very involved in track and cross country running. Sara is one of the top runners in the state and has won several region titles.

That last statement is an understatement. Sara was the Sunrise Region Champion in track and cross country 12 times in the past three years, winning every possible distance event from the 800 to the 3200 in track and is the three-time Sunrise Region cross country champion. She was voted in as a Legend, unanimously, this fall. Sara had this to say about herself as far as her commitment to running:

Four years ago I discovered something about myself that changed my life. I discovered I could run. Not just jog, but run: competitively. Before high school I played soccer, but never had I felt like I loved the sport. I frequently sat on the bench, ducked away from headers, and got pushed down by stronger players. Then the summer before freshman year I

decided to try out for cross country. Within two weeks I was already running with varsity..... I had finally found a place where I felt I belonged. Later that year I did track as well. That's where this sport really stole my heart. Every time I step out onto that rubbery track I am reminded of who I am and why I do this; running is the quality that defines me. It's what makes me, me.

Finally, I would be remiss to not mention that Sara's running accomplishments don't stop with Region titles. Sara is a three-time state champion: as a member of the Coronado cross country team (2012) and, in track, the 4x800 relay team (2013 and 2014).

Sara is headed for the University of Georgia this fall and another of Sara's recommenders had this to say:

Sara is the girl everyone wants for a daughter.... She's a very special young lady, and I'm convinced she will represent Las Vegas very well there [at Georgia].

Eduardo Esquivel, better known as Eddie, was a member of the National Honor Society and President of the Student Council his senior year at Eldorado. He graduated with a class rank of 22/387 and a weighted GPA of 4.1. One of his coaches had this to say:

Eddie is a role model on campus. He encourages his teammates and leads by example through hard work. As team captain, he fosters a sense of camaraderie... Being a leader is not always easy, but Eddie exemplifies those qualities through courage and quiet strength. At Eldorado High School, he is well respected among the students, faculty and administration.

Eddie is also a terrific cross country runner, especially when it comes to big races. He is the two-time Sunrise Region champion and two-time state runner-up (2012 and 2013). He was elected to the Legends HOF in 2013. Eddie also ran track and finished third at state in both the 1600 and 3200 in 2012. He had this to say about his running:

Running has shaped who I am now and helped me grow and experience things I thought I would never get to do.... I am able to handle being the school's student body president because of running and the spirit it gave me. Running has opened many doors and opportunities for me but the biggest has been the opportunity to help pay for college on a running scholarship to further my education.

Miguel Garcia, one of three SECTA graduates among this year's scholarship winners, ranked 9th in his class of 311, with a 4.5 (weighted) GPA. Miguel's athletic accomplishments and involvement with student activities are highlighted in the following letter of recommendation from the school's Athletic Director:

Miguel has been a member of our Varsity Cross Country for four years and Varsity Volleyball team for three years. He also has been a member of the Student Organization of Latinos for the past four years.... He is a member of the 2012-2013 Nevada D1A Cross Country State Runner-up Team, serving as its team captain, and a member of the 2012-2013 D1A Nevada Volleyball State Champion Team, also serving as its team captain. Throughout his athletic career he has won four Scholar Athlete Awards.

His cross country coach had this to add:

A solid performer, he capped his high school career with a 6th place finish at the State Championship in Reno.... Miguel's leadership was instrumental in our undefeated season and Regional Championship this year as well as our State Runner-up finish the year before.

Miguel, in his application essay, made much of his involvement with the Las Vegas Track Club and its contribution to his love of running.

At the age of twelve, I certainly dreaded waking up early to run these [track club] races; however the friendly faces of the LVTC members and closely knit community made me feel part of something bigger and gave me motivation to run. People like Tommy Hodges, Marybelle Russell, and Werner Helmuth had a big influence on me and my running career as they inspired me to never give up.

My running epiphany occurred in my sophomore year of high school. We were running on the Pecos Legacy trail. I remember the crisp air entering my lungs, the sound of my teammate's footsteps next to mine. Everything seemed too perfect, effortless, as if nothing could go wrong. The sensation of this experience is difficult to describe in words, but I truly believe this is when I fell in love with the sport. From then on all I wanted to do was run; it seemed like other aspects of my life were minuscule and non-existent in comparison.

Kathryn Lynn Gorczyca, better known to all as Katie, has a most impressive resume'. Number one in her class of 300 and a straight-A student at West Career and Technical Academy, a CCSD magnet school, Katie is also a two-time State Cross Country Champion (2010 and 2012). She and Abby Miller are the only two runners from southern Nevada to win a state cross country championship—and automatic status as a Legend—as freshmen. And Katie's name is first on the LVTC Championship Series perpetual trophy, as the female winner in 2010. She has been a member of the track club since she was 13 years old.

Katie's high school running career pretty much peaked when she repeated as the D1 cross country state champion in her junior year. Due to a series of nagging injuries since then, she devoted most of her athletic efforts to the triathlon. Always a triathlete by choice, Katie placed 4th at the 2013 Triathlon Nationals and has since been selected to attend the Elite Triathlon Academy at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Featuring world-class support from USA Triathlon and the U.S. Olympic Committee, ETA student-athletes attend the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (on full scholarship, it should be noted).

Here is what one of her recommenders had to say about this remarkable young lady.

Katie has been involved in a plethora of activities, including National Honor Society, FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America), and Student Council, of which she was both the junior and sophomore class president. However, it is track and cross country in which Katie has achieved the most recognition and acclaim.

Here is what Katie has to say about her running. It provides insight into what drives her.

I'll admit that people who run are crazy. However, these "crazy" people are the most down-to-earth people that I know. Frankly, these people are also some of my best friends. We all share the same love and we all think running is fun. We like to get sweaty, sore, and tired. At the end of the day, we all know that it was worth it. However, not all runners like to push themselves like I do. I am willing to wake up at the crack of dawn to run and train in beautiful yet scorching hot Las Vegas weather. I will do whatever it takes to be a better runner than I was yesterday.

There you have it. Four track club members all headed off to college with their bank balances a bit more on the plus side thanks to the Las Vegas Track Club. Next month I'll feature the other four scholarship winners: Logan Lucas, David Perez, Martin Ponce, and Jesse Thornock.

(Phil Lawton)