

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

The marathon of life

BY STEPHANIE BRUCE
Special to the Daily Sun

The title feels so fitting as I try to recap my 26.2-mile journey at the Kauai Marathon last weekend. It landed in the middle of one of my 90-mile training weeks and doubled as a family trip to Hawaii — vacation for them, “work” for mama.

Work can mean so many different things that the balance between work, play and life can often blur. As a parent, you’re always at work. And while it’s the most rewarding job in the world, with no limits on how much effort you’ll pour into it, I find that running is a beautiful complement to that role.

Back in 2012, I raced the Honolulu Marathon and placed third. It was an incredible experience to run and compete in Hawaii, and I knew I wanted to return as soon as possible for another Hawaii marathon. But as life unfolded — three kids over the next 12 years, busy school and kids’ sports schedules, my own wild racing calendars — the timing never worked.

Until now. In 2025, my “new normal” has opened more space for joy and flexibility. Between raising a tod-

dlar and two preteens, juggling youth sports and navigating a semi-new career path, I’ve learned how to fit training into the chaos and allow for more wiggle room and flexibility (and fun!) in my planning. So when the opportunity came to race the Kauai Marathon and bring my family along for a vacation, despite prioritizing a different fall marathon, the answer was an immediate “yes!”

Hawaii’s climate is just a tad bit different from Flagstaff (jokes — Flagstaff is as dry as can be, and Hawaii is as humid as can be).

The humidity hit the moment we stepped outside. It was also different than most race experiences I’ve grown accustomed to. Unlike many of my races, this one didn’t have a big pro field or the same support systems. On race morning, Ben (my husband) and I boarded the school buses with the rest of the runners. No elite fluid stations here, so I improvised: an 8-ounce squirt bottle with my electrolyte-carb mix and three gels tucked into my race kit. The starting conditions were 74 Fahrenheit and 81% humidity. I jogged for three min-

utes to get moving, knowing the heat alone would warm me up by mile one.

The course climbs over 1,900 feet in elevation, with views that make the effort worthwhile.

The first 11 miles passed quickly as the sun rose at our backs, and Ben ran alongside me. At mile 10, just before the marathon and half-marathon courses split, he gave me a few last words of advice: Be patient. Find your rhythm. Stay strong on the uphills. Let the downhills carry you. And most of all — enjoy it.

And enjoy it I did. I grabbed water at almost every station, grateful for the volunteers and locals who set up tables in front of their homes. The course doubles back on itself, so in the last 8 miles I crossed paths with other marathoners still heading out. Their encouragement fueled me, and I returned it with fist bumps and quick “good jobs” where I could. Those moments truly embody the spirit of the running community.

Approaching the finish, I knew my kids and Ben were waiting. My legs were heavy, my body drenched in sweat, but my heart was overflowing. I had



COURTESY

Stephanie Bruce smiles as she wins the Kauai Marathon

just completed my first marathon victory, crossing in 2:48:20 — just four minutes off the course record. Looks like I may need to come back for another shot!

Thank you for sharing this journey with

me. Until next time — Mahalo.

Stephanie Bruce is a mama of 3, runner, entrepreneur, and lover of coffee, movies and life. She feels lucky to have called Flagstaff her

home for 15 years.

Rachel Smith is the coordinating editor for the High Country Running column. You can email her at rachsneid18@gmail.com to contribute to this column.



PHOTOS BY HATTIE LOPER, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

Coconino Panthers libero Lucie Whiting (3) passes during a match against Agua Fria on Wednesday at Coconino High School.

COCONINO

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The third set looked to be all Coconino. However, a 4-0 start was quickly erased by a 5-1 run from Agua Fria. A

Kaylee Karnbach kill broke the tie before three straight Coconino points led to yet another timeout from the Owls.

The Panthers pulled away at the end of the match to put a bow on their first win. A 5-0 run

that ended with a Rhoton ace brought out Agua Fria’s final timeout. The run extended to a 9-0 stretch to bring Coconino one score away from match point.

An Agua Fria service error ended the

game in Coconino’s favor, 25-15, 25-16, 25-13.

Coconino (1-2) was scheduled to play in

the Sand Devil Volleyball Invitational hosted by Page High School on Friday. The Panthers have three opponents from three different states lined up for the tournament, Monument Valley (Arizona), Kanab (Utah) and Montezuma-Cortez (Colorado).

“We just want to keep working out our kinks, try different lineups and really find what’s going to work best for us going forward in the season,” Ebersole said.

The Panthers will be home next on Sept. 10 against the Greenway Demons, their second and final home match before the start of region play. Agua Fria (0-3, 0-2 4A) will play at Greenway on Monday.



Coconino's Paisley Rhoton (5) pushes the ball over the net during a match against Agua Fria on Wednesday at Coconino High School.



Coconino's Eva Wilke (8) serves during a match against Agua Fria on Wednesday at Coconino High School.

ROUNDUP

FROM PAGE 1

Girls Soccer
Spartans 9, Scorpions 0

Having cruised to a pair of shutout victories in its first two matches of the season, the Northland Prep girls soccer team improved to 3-0 in the fall season with a 9-0 victory at the Sedona Red Rock Scorpions on Thursday night.

Scoring seven goals in the first half, Northland Prep dominated as it has in each of its three matches this season. Junior Reece Kellar led the way with a hat trick in addition to one assist, followed by two goals apiece for sophomore Emery Blair and senior Caroline Foley. Emery Blair also added an assist as eight different players recorded at least one in the match.

Behind senior Maren Skelton’s two assists, junior Allison Farley, senior Bethany Blair, freshman Rosa Paossi, freshman Brooklyn Santiago and junior Reese Garcia all added one apiece.

The Spartans (3-0) have now won 12 consecutive regular-season and playoff matches dating back to Sept. 24, 2024. After finishing the 2024 regular season with seven straight wins, Northland Prep won both of its postseason matches en route to its third consecutive fall girls soccer state championship.

Sedona Red Rock (0-2) had also dropped its season opening match 9-0 to the Payson Longhorns before losing to Northland Prep at home.

Northland Prep will head to the Ric Grenell Cowboy Invitational in Las Vegas Sept. 11-13 before returning to regular-season AIA play on Sept. 15 at the Winslow Bulldogs, who will face the Spartans in their regular-season opener.