

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Reflections on aging from an 'old' ultrarunner

BY GEORGE NELSEN
Special to the Daily Sun

I am a 71-year-old "recovering" ultrarunner! In 1999, after several marathons and realizing I was not getting any faster, I decided to try an ultra.

My first was the historic JFK 50-miler in November 1999. I loved it and was immediately hooked. I eventually graduated to 100-milers (three) and even one 72-hour race (146.7 miles at Across the Years in Phoenix in 2008). By 2022, I had finished over 70 ultras. The last was the 24 Hour Run for Cancer, a race I created in 2004 in Virginia, where I ran 53.5 miles in 2022.

My running decline started in late 2021, a year after moving from Virginia to Arizona. After running 12 "fast" races in 2021, I suddenly slowed way down in November and noticed new aches and pains, including my IT band starting to



George Nelsen and Neil Weintraub are pictured on one of NATRA's weekly Saturday morning community runs.

bother me. My knees, hips and ankles were fine. I just got slow — my "fast" pace increased to a 13- to 14-minute mile.

What happened? I've since realized we runners all "hit the wall" of old age. It varies a lot, but eventually we all get there. So, what do you do when that

happens? Never stop moving!

Keep running or walking. For me, speed was never that important. It was the distance that mattered, and putting in the miles, regardless of time, makes a big difference. Nowadays, I'm happy to "run" at least 4 to 5 miles two or three

times a week, slowly at a 17- or 18-minute-a-mile pace, with a few aches while doing so.

When I moved to Williams, I felt lucky to have found the Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association (NATRA). NATRA hosts free social trail runs every Saturday morning at various lo-

cations around Flagstaff, Williams, Parks and Sedona.

With a diversity of ages from those in their early 20s to mid-70s, there are paces from "really fast" to "super slow." All who join accomplish their goals of any distance. Given my current "running" pace, I frequently hang with the "fast" walkers, including the group's 25-year organizer, Neil Weintraub, where we lead from the rear, ensuring no one gets lost or left behind.

Since joining in 2021, Neil lets me know if the run is "George friendly," meaning few rocks and not too technical. My favorites are Campbell Mesa, Observatory Mesa, Sinclair Wash, Johnson Canyon Tunnel, Waterline Road, Pine Grove Campground, Soldiers Trail Loop, Aspen Corner, Sandy Seep to Picture Canyon and the Soulstice Mountain Trail Run course. I can almost

always log 6 miles. Thanks to the low-key group, I plan on running this way for many more years.

So, if you are slowing down, have new aches and pains and no longer think you are a "runner," think twice. Join some NATRA Saturday runs and just keep moving.

RETIRED ARMY LTC GEORGE NELSEN KEEPS BUSY RUNNING WITH NATRA AND VOLUNTEERING WITH FRIENDS OF THE FOREST, ARIZONA SITE STEWARDS AND WALNUT CANYON NATIONAL MONUMENT. GEORGE AND HIS WIFE, TERRI, ARE PROUD GREEN BAY PACKERS FANS AND OWNERS. HE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO ONCE AGAIN PARTICIPATING IN THE 27TH ANNUAL SOULSTICE MOUNTAIN TRAIL RUN ON OCT. 10.

RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM OF TWO AMAZING DAUGHTERS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER AND THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN. SHE WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE COLUMN AND SHARE YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY BY EMAILING HER AT RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM.

LOCAL

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and Nidaya Nez won by a nearly identical score at No. 3, 21-3, 21-6. Senior Peighton Killeen and freshman Anna Kranzow won 21-11, 21-5 at No. 2 and senior Hannah Thom and junior Nola Henderson won that same 21-11, 21-5 score as the fours pairing.

Junior Ivy Clevenger and sophomore Grace Naleski battled to a 21-15, 21-18 victory in the closest match of the day as the two played together for the first time this season at No. 5.

Flagstaff will wrap up its regular season schedule next week with a home match against the Mountain-side Wolves on Monday at 4 p.m. and a trip to face the Fountain Hills Falcons on Wednesday at 4 p.m.

Boys volleyball

Eagles 3, Yetis 0

Playing the first of two matches in a week, No. 24 BASIS Flagstaff (0-7, 0-0 3A Metro) lost to No. 18 NFL YET (3-3, 2-0 3A Independent) on Wednesday in Phoenix.

The schools will face off again in Flagstaff on Tuesday at 5 p.m. for the first of back-to-back home games for the Yetis. BASIS Flagstaff will host the Scottsdale Christian Eagles at 4 p.m. on Wednesday.

Girls tennis

Eagles 9, Rattlers 0

Extending its winning streak to nine consecutive matches, No. 7 Flagstaff (10-1, 5-0 D-II Section II) swept No. 59 North Canyon on the road in Phoenix on Thursday.

Across the seven matches that were contested, the Eagles lost a total of seven games. In singles play, junior Lynneah Birdno, sophomore Julia Overhiser and sophomore Karma Saathoff all won 6-0, 6-0 at No. 2, No. 3 and No. 4 re-

spectively. Junior Autumn Didovic won 6-1, 6-0 at the top spot in the order while freshman Sloane Sahl finished off her match at No. 5 6-1, 6-3.

In doubles, Sahl and Overhiser won 8-1 at the top spot with junior Morgan Maloney and sophomore Izzy Bland winning 8-1 at No. 2.

Flagstaff is scheduled for three matches in four days next week beginning with a trip to Barry Goldwater on Tuesday for a 3:30 p.m. match, followed by 3:30 p.m. home matches against Prescott and Raymond S. Kellis on Thursday and Friday.

Bears 7, Panthers 2

No. 31 Coconino (5-6, 1-5 D-II Section II) lost for the second time in three days on Thursday as it fell to No. 34 Bradshaw Mountain (6-4, 4-2 D-II Section II) in Prescott Valley.

Senior Alora Richardson earned Coconino's lone singles victory of the day as she beat senior Brielle Bennion 4-6, 6-4, 10-6. In doubles, senior Talia Garcia and junior Eve Peterson won their fourth consecutive match together at No. 2 with a 9-8 win.

The Panthers will play a pair of road matches next week, facing the Prescott Badgers on Tuesday and the Barry Goldwater Bulldogs on Thursday. Both matches will begin at 3:30 p.m.

Boys tennis

Eagles 5, Rattlers 4

Looking to hold on to a playoff spot in Division II, No. 12 Flagstaff (8-1, 4-0 D-II Section II) extended its winning streak to seven straight matches as it beat No. 40 North Canyon (4-7, 2-4 D-II Section II) in the Valley on Thursday.

With two matches forfeited, Flagstaff battled to earn two points in doubles and

three across the top of the singles lineup.

Senior August Fahy and freshman Dylan Harman won 8-0 at No. 1 in doubles, with sophomore Wylie Carlson and freshman Isaac Smotek winning 8-3 at No. 2.

Fahy, playing at No. 1, and Carlson, playing at No. 3, both won 6-0, 6-0 to improve to 8-1 and 8-0 respectively in singles play this season. Harmin won 6-3, 7-6 at No. 2 to improve to 8-1 overall this season.

Flagstaff will play three matches in four days next week, beginning with a 3:30 p.m. match at home against Barry Goldwater on Tuesday. The Eagles will travel to Prescott on Thursday and Raymond S. Kellis on Friday, with both matches also starting at 3:30 p.m.

Baseball

Eagles 14, Bears 6

Completing a season sweep of No. 22 Bradshaw Mountain (6-6, 5-2 4A Grand Canyon), No. 9 Flagstaff (9-1, 7-1 4A Grand Canyon) rallied back from an early deficit for a road victory on Thursday.

Trailing 3-1 entering the third inning, Flagstaff put up five runs to take a 6-3 lead. After Bradshaw Mountain immediately answered with three runs in the bottom of the third to tie the game 6-6, the Eagles answered with eight unanswered runs to put the game out of reach.

Sophomore Teyan Clerry led Flagstaff with three hits and four runs scored against the Bears. Junior Aeneyas Clerry, junior Jace Adams and junior Tobyn Phillips all recorded three hits in the game and scored two runs apiece. Phillips, Aeneyas Clerry and Jayce Vesely each recorded 2 RBIs as eight different players drove in at least one run for the Eagles.

Vesely held the

Bears to just two hits, two hit batters and no walks in his four innings of work while recording one strikeout. Senior Trey Parker struck out six batters in 2 2/3 innings, allowing six runs on six hits and three walks.

The Eagles will face the ALA — Queen Creek Patriots on the road Saturday at 11 a.m.

Elks 11, Spartans 1

Falling behind early as No. 10 Round Valley (10-1, 5-0 2A North) scored at least one run in each inning, No. 24 Northland Prep (4-4, 3-1 2A North) had its four-game winning streak snapped on the road Thursday.

Sophomore Cooper Skersick drove in Northland Prep's lone run with a RBI double to score sophomore Wyatt Massey.

Northland Prep will travel to face the Kingman Academy Tigers at 3 p.m. on Monday followed by a 4 p.m. game at the Hopi Bruins on Wednesday.

Softball

Vikings 11, Spartans 1

Facing off with one of the top schools in the 1A Conference, No. 12 Northland Prep (5-2, 2-0 2A North) fell to No. 4 Williams (7-4, 0-0 1A North) on the road Thursday.

Williams jumped out to a 5-0 lead in the first inning and scored in each inning of the game to eventually force the run rule in the fifth. Senior Hayden Massey came up with the Spartans' lone hit in the game while junior Wren Gutt-Ohly recorded the only RBI to drive in senior Isabel Stoffers.

Northland Prep was scheduled to face the Round Valley Elks on Friday at 4 p.m. before playing three games next week against Kingman Academy on Monday, Hopi on Wednesday and Many Farms on Friday.



MALLORY DERRICK, NAU ATHLETICS

Northern Arizona Lumberjacks guard Naomi White (25) dribbles the ball near the baseline during a game against the Idaho Vandals in the Walkup Skydome on Feb 26.

WHITE

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role on an SEC team right from the jump. The 5-foot-9 guard brings explosive scoring abilities to Knoxville. She notably scored a career-high 37 points against Weber State in Ogden, Utah, back on Jan. 8, with a program-record nine 3-pointers in that game.

She averaged 20.8 points per game and started in all 32 of NAU's games this past season. White ultimately finished as the 15th-leading scorer in D-I after hovering in the top 10 for much of the year.

White scored 24 points in her collegiate debut against New Mexico on Nov. 3, 2025. She started the season scoring at least 20 points in the first six games and reached that marker 19 times.

White led the Big Sky Conference in scoring. She was named to the All-Big Sky First Team and won the league's Freshman of the Year award.

White came to NAU from Grand Canyon University, where she redshirted under head coach Molly Miller, who has since moved on to be the head coach at Arizona State. White followed GCU associate head coach and recruiting coordinator Laura Dinkins to Flagstaff after she was named the team's next head coach on April 1, 2025.

NAU went 10-22 with a conference record of 6-12 this past season, being eliminated in the first round of the Big Sky Tournament in Boise, Idaho, as the No. 7 seed. The Lumberjacks operated with just two returning players from the prior year and an entirely new coaching staff. White, with three years of eligibility remaining, will once again enter a rebuilding program for her third college stop in as many years.

White is the second transfer to commit to Tennessee so far this offseason. Liberty transfer Avery Mills, another 5-foot-9 guard, announced her commitment earlier in the week. She was also a first-team all-conference and all-freshman player in Conference USA.