

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Kahtoola Uphill offers more than just a challenge

BY CHLOE PAINTER

Special to the Daily Sun

The Kahtoola Uphill race is a unique Flagstaff event that has brought together our community of outdoor enthusiasts, runners, skiers and others alike every February since 2007. Kahtoola Uphill is a fun way for people to showcase their ability to tackle steep, snowy terrain, celebrate our tight-knit mountain community and raise funds for Friends of Camp Colton.

Camp Colton is a nonprofit outdoor education program. It hosts students annually and teaches them about science and nature and how to become environmental stewards.

Kahtoola Uphill is near and dear to my heart because I attended Camp Colton multiple times growing up. It truly encompasses and encourages many of Flagstaff's environmental values



Chloe Painter competes in the Öo'mawki climb during the Kahtoola Uphill challenge on Feb. 8.

JASON WILDER, COURTESY

and helps protect the forest.

This year on Feb. 8, over 300 participants chose to use MICROspikes or an alpine touring ski setup to scale the mountain and race back down.

The current rendi-

tion of the event offers three different distances to choose from. The Öo'mawki climb is the most popular of the three. Öo'mawki — the traditional Hopi name for the peak meaning "place of clouds" — looks

to honor the Indigenous heritage in our community. Climbing from 9,200 feet up to 11,500 in a mere 1.5 miles, this race is quite the challenge.

I have gotten the opportunity to participate in the Kahtoola

Uphill race for the past three years, and it is an event I now look forward to every winter. Competing with many of my coworkers at Babbitt's Backcountry, it is one giant celebration of our Flagstaff community and all our crazy like-mindedness to choose to suffer at high elevation.

As we ascend the mountain and crest the top of the steepest climb, called Waterfall, we are enthusiastically greeted by ski and courtesy patrol (one of them being my dad, more famously known as Mr. Painter). At the top of Waterfall, participants are offered a Mother Road beverage, which I hesitantly pass on (I'd rather not throw up mid-race!). We continue climbing higher and higher into increasingly thinner air, the sun sets on northern Arizona and creates a beautiful sky above the clouds. Once we top out at

11,500 feet in elevation, we are welcomed by more cheers.

Our lungs are relieved to begin the descent. Arms flail and legs throb as we fly down the mountain to meet the spectators lining the finish who are cheering loudly for all.

The comradery and competitiveness of this race are what make this event so fun. Any given year, this race could include a multitude of high-caliber athletes. Looking at past results, you will see prominent names such as Jim Walmsley, Jess Brazeau, Molly Seidel and Mike Popejoy. The vast age span of children, families and older locals is equally exciting — especially with many sporting funky costumes and showcasing amazing dance moves postrace!

This beloved community tradition is one of the many reasons why I love calling Flagstaff home.

VOLLEYBALL

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to click in, but it was taking a little longer than usual, so we were getting a little worried. But once we started hitting our first few shots, we knew that we could do it and that we had it, and we just went on our run."

Eagles head coach Beth Haglin said she noticed the girls were nervous and thought it was a mix of nerves due to the rivalry and jitters of the first home match of the year.

"I thought the girls played really well," Haglin said. "I think the nerves got the best of them in the early stages of each match, but I felt like once they got going, they did their job. Our game plan was put into place."

At the fives court to start the day, Flagstaff sophomores Nidaya Nez and Nola Henderson dominated over Coconino sophomores Lucie Whiting and Paisley Rhoton 21-15, 21-8. Nez, who is fresh off a state tournament title run with the girls basketball team, played her first beach volleyball match of the season on Wednesday due to the basketball team's deep postseason push.

Flagstaff's fours of Harleigh Moseng and Brynn Hagerman did not give up more than 13 points between both sets. They scored 21-7 in



Coconino's Lucie Whiting (4) sets up an attack Wednesday during a crosstown rivalry match against host Flagstaff at Flagstaff Athletic Club — East.

the first and 21-5 in the next. Coconino's fours of Eva Wilke and Payton Phillips could not keep up with Moseng and Hagerman.

At the twos court, Coconino's McKenlee Lund and Laurel Cernohous lost 21-17, 21-18 to Lillian Hartman and Gabriela Saucedo-Salas.

Flagstaff's top pairing of Sophie Krassner and Macie Moseng complet-

ed the sweep over Ava Gray and Lucy Stiegler, 21-12, 21-6.

Some of the girls from the Flagstaff and Coconino teams play club volleyball together during the off-season, and the rivalry match became more tense because of their close relationships. The girls know each other's strengths and weaknesses.

"We love [Coconino] to death," Haglin said. "They're awesome. They're great girls. There's those expectations when you come in and just have fun with the people you really care about. But the hard part is that those emotions run high, and everyone wants to win. It's Coconino and Flag High, of course we want to win."

On Coconino's side, Naomi Gray plays with several of the Flagstaff girls on a club team and said it was "harder" to play against them because they know each other so well.

"It puts a little bit of extra pressure on us," she said.

Flagstaff is scheduled to play at Dysart on March 26 for its second section match of the sea-

son. Coconino played Trivium Prep on Friday and will host Northwest Christian for its second section game.

This was the only rivalry game between the schools all year. The only time that they would have a chance to face off again is during the state championships.

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LOCAL

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Fria on Wednesday in Avondale.

Watkins was 3 for 4 at the plate with two RBIs and three runs score. Cailee Culwell also contributed two RBIs in the win for 4A Flagstaff, which totaled 14 hits while limiting its opponent to two.

The Eagles, who improved to 2-0 to start the spring, score five runs in the bottom of the fourth, taking advantage of Agua Fria's seven

total errors in the game. Flagstaff saw four different players each steal a base in the win.

Flagstaff will host 2A Mohave Accelerated Monday for a 3:45 p.m. game, which starts a three-game homestand for the Eagles.

Panthers 12, Volunteers 1

Coconino made noise in its first Grand Canyon Region ballgame of the season, trouncing Lee Williams in Kingman courtesy of a six-run fifth inning and a sound performance

from Kaitlyn Tso in the circle.

Tso didn't walk a single batter and allowed one run on two hits in the run-rule victory in five innings. Panthers freshman Emma Kennelly went 2 for 3, notched a game-high four RBIs, roped a triple and scored two runs in the win, which pushed 4A Coconino to 2-1 overall.

Mia Pozar was 3 for 3 at the plate and added three RBIs for the Panthers.

Coconino plays host to open the region series

against Prescott Tuesday at 4 p.m.

Boys tennis**Volunteers 7, Eagles 2**

Flagstaff dropped to 0-3 after a home-opening loss on Wednesday to Lee Williams.

The Division II Eagles won a match in doubles and in singles. Aaron Kirk and August Fahy outlasted their opponents at the No. 1 doubles court, 9-8. Eagles freshman Wylie Carlson battled to a win at the No. 4 singles spot, 1-6,

6-2, 10-7.

Fahy saw his match goes the distance, falling 6-1, 2-6, 10-5.

Flagstaff is slated to be on the road for a Tuesday match against Deer Valley.

Girls tennis**Panthers 7, Bulldogs 2**

D-II Coconino got back to .500 at 2-2 with a road win over D-II Sierra Linda on Thursday, coming away with victories at all the doubles courts.

Alora Richardson and

Samira OldElk won 8-6 at the No. 1 doubles flight for the Panthers, who were coming off a 0-9 loss to Lee Williams earlier in the week. Kailyn Anderson and Mei Cobb joined up to win at the No. 2 doubles flight, 8-4, and Amy Rodriguez and Josie Kennan won 8-0 as the No. 3 duo.

The Panthers gave away wins at the top two singles flights, occupied by Richardson and OldElk, respectively.

Coconino is away for its next match, which is against Mingus Union on Tuesday.