

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Running in the glorious rain

BY RACHEL SMITH
Special to the Daily Sun

For many people, rain is a reason to stay inside. Growing up in New England, I dreaded a rainy day as a kid — and rain in the forecast felt far from uncommon. Fast forward to now having spent the last decade of my life in Flagstaff, and rain in the forecast feels cause enough for celebration.

My birthday was this past weekend, and I couldn't think of a better start to a new year than with a long run through a monsoon. It was one of those runs where within mere moments, everything was drenched, visibility was limited and puddles practically became ponds — so large that there was no way to run around them and no way of knowing how deep they were until my leg was the measuring stick. I laughed at myself as I reflected back on how in New England I'd often grumble about running in the rain, and now I completely relished it and was viewing it as a lucky birthday gift.

It's well known that Flagstaff, while exceptionally wonderful for outdoor enthusiasts in many ways, has a very dry climate and can go through patches of extreme drought, which makes living here sometimes feel scary. This past winter was a particularly dry one, with some reports stating that the city received approximately 60 inches less snow than average. As summer neared, my runner friends and I could feel how "extra dry" the air seemed, as we felt we needed more hydration on runs than normal.

Fear around wildfires became more palpable with each passing dry week, and unfortunately the fear became reality when the Pocket Fire ignited on June 19 — rapidly spreading to over 27,000 acres. While thousands of firefighters worked tirelessly around the clock and nearing neigh-



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

borhoods were put on Set or Go status for evacuation, the need for precipitation was ever evident.

During the weeks that the Pocket Fire burned beloved forests in the canyon between Sedona and Flagstaff, the smoke from the fire made the air quality in Flagstaff so bad that there were days where being outside was not advised. Sporting events were canceled or moved to neighboring towns, runners often opted for treadmills or traveling to nonaffected areas, and kids were sometimes made to move their play inside rather than breathe the polluted air. It felt like people, animals and the Earth were collectively praying and willing the rain to come.

And, finally, it has! I'm not sure how much rain Flagstaff has received this past week or two — but it has felt fabulous-

ly frequent. And, fortunately, rain in the upcoming forecast is not uncommon! My phone is littered with messages from friends cheering on the monsoons and photos of my 3-year-old joyfully splashing in puddles. On a run this morning I admired orange, yellow, purple and white wildflowers beginning to bloom on the side of the trail and couldn't help but think how even the Earth feels like it is celebrating these recent rains.

What a gift it is to run in the rain.

RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM TO TWO WONDERFUL GIRLS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER, AND FEELS LUCKY TO CALL FLAGSTAFF "HOME." SHE IS ALSO THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN AND WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO IT BY SENDING YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY TO HER AT RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM.



TESSA LINDBERG, NAU ATHLETICS FILE

The Northern Arizona women's soccer team huddles during an exhibition match against Arizona State at Lumberjack Stadium on Aug. 8, 2025.

NAU

FROM PAGE B1

Outdoor track and field

Five current Northern Arizona track and field athletes and four Lumberjack alumni are set to compete at the 2026 Toyota USATF Outdoor Championships at Icahn Stadium in New York.

Current Lumberjacks entered include Rheinhardt Harrison in the men's 1,500 meters, Josiah Johnson in the men's 400-meter hurdles, Cael Grotenhuis in the men's 10,000 meters, Ali Upshaw in the women's 10,000 meters and Ava Mitchell in the women's 5,000 meters.

Harrison opened the competition for NAU with a time of 3:41.81 to place fifth in his heat and fifth overall to qualify for Saturday's final. While Grotenhuis ultimately did not start the men's 10,000m, Upshaw placed 13th with a time of 34:59.12 in the women's 10,000m.

Johnson will compete Saturday in the opening round of the men's 400m hurdles at 1:31 p.m. after earning Second Team All-America honors during the collegiate season. The sophomore enters the meet with the NAU school record of 49.07.

Mitchell will compete Sunday in the women's

5,000m final at 1:41 p.m. Four NAU alumni are also entered in this year's championships.

Drew Bosley is entered in both the men's 10,000m and 5,000m. Annika Reiss will double in the women's 1,500m and 5,000m, while Alex Carlson is entered in the women's 1,500m and Elise Stearns will race the women's 5,000m.

Reiss snagged the final qualifying spot in Thursday's 1,500m with a time of 4:06.58 to place 12th while Carlson placed 16th with a time of 4:09.85. Bosley made a move to front of the pack a little more than halfway through Saturday's 10,000m final and finished third with a time of 30:20.60. Bosley began the bell lap leading the race before former champions Woody Kincaid and Grant Fisher pulled away to take first and second respectively.

Saturday's schedule features Johnson in the men's 400m hurdles first round at 1:31 p.m.

Sunday concludes the championships with Reiss, Stearns and Mitchell competing in the women's 5,000m final at 1:41 p.m., followed by Bosley in the men's 5,000m final at 2:19 p.m.

Live results for the championships will be available throughout the weekend at USATF.org.

MAXWELL NAGLE AND JACK SHEA CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ARTICLE.

8
AUG

HALL OF FAME
DINNER & EVENT

5:00
PM

NAU HIGH COUNTRY CONFERENCE CENTER
201 W. BUTLER AVE., FLAGSTAFF, AZ 86001

The Flagstaff Sports Foundation would like to congratulate and welcome the 2026 Hall of Fame Class of Inductees at our annual event.

Athletes Edison Bahe, Vincent Cortese, Mike Dolby, Terrence Sims, and David Winsley; Coach Trina Painter; community Contributors Keith Johanson and Patrick Nackard and The 2001& 2002 Coconino High School Girls 4A State Championship Volleyball Teams will be honored.

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SCAN ME

Ticket Purchase

Website

General Admission tickets are \$75/person or Reserve a Table of eight for \$700.

Information about our organization and a ticket purchase link can be found on our website flagstaffsportsfoundation.org or scan above.

"Celebrating individuals in Flagstaff who have excelled in the sports community ultimately allowing us to give back to those individuals, primarily the Flagstaff youth, where we can positively impact their lives and provide an outlet for them to excel outside of their educational priorities. "

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