

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Running into myself

BY ALYNN DAVIS
Special to the Daily Sun

In a remarkable display of resilience and determination, I (Alynn Davis), a deaf ultrarunner, returned to the relentless, grueling terrain of the Cocodona 250 for a second attempt. I pushed farther than ever before, endured pouring rain during the first three days and nights, trudged through unforgiving mud and nearly washed downstream in the Verde River at one point.

As if that wasn't enough fun, it even snowed and hailed.

After months of training, planning and preparing mentally and physically, I toed the Cocodona starting line once again. I was driven by unfinished business and a passion for defying limits.

The Cocodona 250 is a grueling 250-mile (256 this year to be precise) footrace across Arizona's mountainous desert terrain, and it is known for testing even the most elite endurance athletes.

This year, I made it to an astounding 224.9 miles — just 31 miles from the finish — before having to withdraw. It wasn't the outcome I hoped for, but it was a deeply personal milestone and a powerful testament to perseverance and the strength of the human spirit. MY spirit!

Even though I didn't cross the finish line, I'm proud of how far I went. Every mile was earned, and I know I gave everything I had out there. What stood out for me was as if my inner soul came out of its shell, creating a different per-

spective of who I am. The trail is a great teacher.

As the first deaf athlete to compete in the Cocodona, I am honored to help pave the way for other deaf athletes to embark on this journey. Hopefully some of the lessons I learned as I overcame obstacles, such as ineffective headlamps and limited communication access, will aid future deaf athletes. Supporters from across both the deaf community and the running community followed my journey closely, inspired by my grit and commitment. For many, myself included, the effort itself is more powerful than a finish line photo. The support and love I received from across the country is deeply heartwarming and overwhelmingly

beautiful.

I know I'll be back for redemption, aiming to cross the finish line, but ultimately seeking to find a deeper version of myself. If I'm not toeing the starting line in 2026 (I may decide to pace, crew or work the event next year), I'll definitely be out there in 2027!

Alynn Davis is a Flagstaff resident who proves that the finish line isn't the only mark of triumph. She pushes through relentless terrain and brutal conditions, not necessarily emerging with a medal, but with a powerful story of grit and growth. Rachel Smith is a professional runner and amateur mother. She is also the coordinating editor for this column and encourages people to send their stories to her at rachschnid18@gmail.com.



HARRISON

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the best receiver in what was a stacked wide receiver class, including Malik Nabers, Rome Odunze, Brian Thomas Jr., Ladd McConkey and company.

But out of the rookie receiver bunch, Harrison finished with the fifth-most receiving yards and receptions. He tied with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' Jalen McMillan for the second-most receiving touchdowns, securing eight.

"No matter what's happening on the field, I am just very humble. But I feel like I definitely do have a switch I can switch on more next year," Harrison said. "I think that just comes with being comfortable playing the game, and playing at the speed of the NFL."

Harrison has a unique view on the two cornerbacks Arizona selected in the 2025 NFL draft. Phoenix native Denzel Burke came from Harrison's former team, the Buckeyes, while Will Johnson hails from Ohio State's arch rival, Michigan, aka the "Team up North." The Cardinals took Johnson in the second round with their second pick (47th overall), followed by Burke in the fifth round (No. 147 overall).

"He's definitely up there as one of the best ones I've faced," Harrison said of Johnson, who slid from a projected Day 1 selection to the second round following injury concerns. "He and Denzel. They're both here now. So, definitely the top of the line for the corners I faced in college."

Harrison feels that the new and improved Cardinals are contenders for the playoffs. His main concern heading into the season is reaching that goal and securing a hometown playoff game for Cardinals' fans. Arizona's last trip to the postseason came in 2021, when the Cardinals lost to the Rams at SoFi Stadium in the wild-card round. The Cardinals haven't hosted a playoff game since Jan. 16, 2016, when they beat the Green Bay Packers in the divisional round.

Nearly a decade has passed since that home playoff game — a nail-biting 24-20 overtime win at what was then called the University of Phoenix Stadium. Harrison figures the Cardinals are due for another shot at the postseason.

"First, (it) starts with team success, I think you've got to make the playoffs," Harrison said. "This is the year that I feel like we want to do what we need to do. We have all the pieces we need. We just gotta go out there and execute at this point. That's why they brought me here, to help this team win games."

"So, improvement for me looks like winning more games than last year. I want to get a hometown (playoff) game for Arizona."

The Cardinals open the regular season Sept. 7 against the Saints in New Orleans, before hosting the Carolina Panthers Sept. 14 at State Farm Stadium.



HATTIE LOPER, ARIZONA DAILY SUN FILE

Coconino's Fernando Ramirez (10) runs the ball into the end zone for a touchdown during a game against Lee Williams at Coconino High School this past fall.

FOOTBALL

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to be Coconino's representative for the Bill Epperson award.

The First Team All-Grand Canyon Region player had a short runway to flash his talent to presumptive recruits. Before leading the Panthers in his senior year with over 1,100 yards from scrimmage and 17 touchdowns in 2024, he backed up Bridger French, who went on to rush for nearly 1,700 yards in 2023. Ramirez only had 32 carries as a junior, according to MaxPreps, but averaged a team-high 10.8 yards per carry to run for 345 yards.

"I was kind of in a spot where I didn't know if there was going to be a chance of me

playing football again," Ramirez said.

Ramirez had the resume to show he was capable of being a key piece to a winning program. As a senior, he ran for at least 100 yards in five games and scored at least three touchdowns in three outings. A signature game was in the homecoming matchup against Mingus, where he ran for 133 yards and three touchdowns in a 49-12 win that earned him an Ed Doherty Medallion nomination.

In his conversations with the Salt River staff, Ramirez and the coaches were on the same page about focusing on development and setting up players for a chance to play at a higher level.

"That's what I was honestly looking for," Ramirez said. "I was

looking for help to get to the next level. I would love to go play at a Division II, III or even DI college, but I also know that there are steps to get there, especially in my situation."

Ramirez said it took him about a month or so to make that decision. With help from his coaches at Coconino and planning logistics with his mother, he was able to come up with a plan.

The prospect of going to school in Phoenix required a lot of hoops to jump through to make it work. For one, there was the question of what his living situation would look like. Since Phoenix College doesn't offer on-campus dorms, Ramirez had to find out where he would stay. He also needed to figure out how to get around.

"It was more just a concern of living down there and how to get from one place to another," Ramirez said. "The big thing was figuring out expenses and trying to get a vehicle down there."

Ramirez now has a plan to make it work, including staying with some family he has in the Valley. He expects the team's summer report date to be sometime in July and wants to hit the ground running.

Ramirez credits the lessons he learned from his time with Coconino across two different coaching staffs that made him feel like family and were willing to be straight up with him.

Looking back at this process, Ramirez understands the work it took to earn a collegiate football offer. He also thinks that people in his situation in the future will need to have a strong attitude toward focusing on schoolwork.

"I would tell people to definitely pay attention when people say to hit the books hard," he said. "Don't slack on your grades, don't fall behind because if you want to play college ball, those are definitely going to matter."

Ramirez will be studying sports medicine at Phoenix College with his aim set high on proving that he can continue to grow.



JAKE BACON, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

Flanked by his mom and grandmother Fernando Ramirez signs a letter of intent to play football for the Salt River Scorpions.

US OPEN

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Scheffler won back-to-back starts, including the PGA Championship at Quail Hollow, when his five-shot victory made him only the third player in history to win each of his first three majors by at least three shots.

In his previous nine starts heading to the Memorial, where he will take a one-shot lead into Sunday's final round, he finished 11th or better eight times, including six times inside the top 5.

But if he gets in the lead, forget it.

Scheffler locks on to the prize as though he's operating a missile system. He has converted his last seven 54-hole solo leads into victory, including the PGA.

"Scottie is the best player in the world, and he's an incredible frontrunner because of how good his ball-striking is," Tony Finau said after watching Scheffler win the PGA by five shots. "He can ball-strike his way into winning golf tournaments, even with an average putter. And so when he's on top of the leaderboard, he's extremely hard to catch."

The same might be true of his long-held lock on the No. 1 ranking in the world.

As of May 26, Scheffler has been ranked No. 1 for just over two years — a span of 105 consecutive weeks. Only Woods spent more consecutive weeks as world No. 1 — once for 281 weeks and another stretch that lasted 264

weeks.

Scheffler moved to No. 1 on May 23, 2023, and has remained there since.

When he ascended to No. 1 in the world for the first time in spring 2022, he said, earnestly: "I never got this far in my dreams."

Now the dream is reality.

Although Rory McIlroy has closed the gap, Scheffler's insane 2024 season, where he won seven times on the PGA Tour and accumulated nine Official World Golf Rankings victories, will keep him on top for a long time.

Curiously, McIlroy was the story of the first half of the year, winning three significant titles and becoming only the sixth player in history to complete the Grand Slam when he won at the Masters.

Since then, though, it has been all Scheffler. It started when he tied the PGA Tour scoring record by shooting 31-under at the CJ Cup Byron Nelson and winning by eight shots. When he won the PGA Championship two weeks later, he became the second player since 1985 to win consecutive events by at least five shots.

Now he comes to Oakmont looking to win the third leg of the Grand Slam.

"He's incredible for golf," McIlroy said.

"He's great for the game. It's hard to not look at what Scottie has done the last couple years and not notice why has he been able to separate himself from the rest of his peers."