

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

# Free running can take you very far

BY NAT WHITE  
Special to the Daily Sun

Think of the videos of wild horses running free — power and grace wrapped in pure spirit and joy. Although a bit romanticized, I remember decades ago having the same feeling while free running through the parks, mesas and cinder flats surrounding Flagstaff.

With the strength and endurance of youth, gliding over any terrain — tall grasses, cinders, volcanic rock fields, slopes and ravines — the feeling of freedom was sublime. Leaving no trace, eyes rapidly shifting from foot to horizon, searching for the next feature to run toward, accompanied only by the sounds of nature and the crunch of my feet, I was engulfed in the natural world.

Flagstaff’s surroundings have many places where the distance



COURTESY

Flagstaff and the surrounding area offer great places to run free.

runner can experience that purity of body, strength and limitlessness. Yes, there is the training element, but there is also that wonderful feeling of freedom.

South of Leupp Road, there are

tall, grass-covered cinder flats. Running cross country one day, I spotted a slight mound in the distance. No tracks or grazing trails led to the mound; only my legs and eyesight brought me

to the remains of the home of a long-gone Indigenous family. I paused for a moment, imagining the story memorialized by the fallen walls, and then set off again across the flat plain.

I remember free running in the Wupatki area among the junipers, once chasing a jack-rabbit. The clever little animals would take off in a series of leaps and disappear behind a rock, rabbitbrush or cedar clump. Running toward the last place I’d seen him, up he’d jump again to find another hiding place, and the game would repeat — a workout without thinking about it.

I once played tag with a curious coyote on Observatory Mesa Natural Preserve. It must have been 30 years ago, running toward A-1 on 515. Up ahead, a coyote crossing the forest road paused to study me. As I approached, he loped off, occasion-

ally looking back. The game was on for the next hour. I’d get close, and he would move on, pausing just long enough to be comfortable while encouraging me.

We were both enjoying the game when he ran down a steep ravine. I flew down the slope to see how close I could get and stepped on a stick with a loud snap. The coyote vanished.

Running free has been one of the most exhilarating experiences of my Flagstaff running career. Try it.

*With time (56-years) and consistency, Nat White has run well over 100,000 miles covering the environs of Flagstaff in all seasons. Rachel Smith is also the coordinating editor of this column and implores you to send articles to her at rachschneid18@gmail.com so you don't get stuck reading her ramblings!*

## FOOTBALL

FROM PAGE B2

come spring ball.”

NAU was touted for retaining all of its coaching staff from last year, with a few getting added responsibilities. Teams are al-

ways looking to upgrade on the coaching side as well as on the field itself. A second winning season for the Lumberjacks could put a few assistant coaches on another team’s radar.

“It didn’t really happen last year,” Wright said. “The likelihood or the chances or odds

of it happening this year are probably a little higher, just because that just naturally happens in college football. We’ll assess the staff here at the end of the season and I’m sure things will come up for them as opportunities arise.”

On top of recruiting other

college players, the focus also turns to bringing in the best high school and junior college talent. The initial signing period for DI football is Dec. 3. The regular signing day period is on Feb. 4, 2026.

“A really special class is coming in here from the high

school group that I’m really excited about,” Wright said. “As always, we’re working extremely hard every day, in season, out of season, weekend, weekday, holiday, you name it. We’re recruiting the junior colleges and the transfer portal.”

## NAU

FROM PAGE B1

able mention.

Pennington ranked in the top 10 in the FCS in passing yards (3,116), passing yards per game (259.7) and completions per game (20.9), in addition to the top 30 in passing touchdowns (19), completion percentage (.657) and passing efficiency (148.5).

Eastman earned honorable mention for the second consecutive season at punt returner. The senior returned 18 punts for 126 yards at an average of 7.0 yards per return this season.

### Women’s basketball

A 21-0 run bridging the third and fourth quarters was too much for NAU women’s basketball to overcome as they fell, 79-60, to Northern Iowa inside the Thomas and Mack Center on Wednesday afternoon.

Naomi White (19 points) and Kayla Williams (16 points) paced NAU (1-6), as Williams posted her season-high in scoring to go along with eight rebounds in just over 17 minutes of action. Emma Dasovich recorded five points and five assists, while J’Bionna Robinson also posted four points and five assists, as each player reached ca-

reer-highs in helpers.

Jenna Twedt led UNI (2-3) with 20 points on 5-of-14 shooting, while Elise Jaeger recorded a double-double with 13 points and 16 boards.

NAU forced UNI to miss its first six straight shots, but the Lumberjacks were only able to gain a 3-0 advantage as they also struggled to shoot to start. A 6-0 UNI run gave the Panthers a 6-3 lead at the first media timeout. UNI used a 7-3 run to lead 14-11 after one quarter.

Poor shooting from NAU in the second quarter allowed the Panthers to sustain an 8-0 run and lead 27-15 midway through the

period. Another triple from White got NAU within nine before both teams endured a scoring drought for the following two minutes. Each team then traded baskets the rest of the period to make it a 36-28 contest at the half.

UNI built a double-digit lead early in the third, thanks to 8-of-15 shooting in the period to lead by 15 heading into the final frame. The Panthers continued their hot shooting into the fourth to gain a comfortable advantage by the midway point of the quarter, as NAU held UNI without a field goal the last 4:46 of the contest.

NAU was outrebounded by a slim 41-38 margin, but won the

turnover battle, 20-16, and limited Northern Iowa to just six second-chance points.

The Lumberjacks played their first meeting with UNI since 1994, and trail 1-3 in the all-time series. Williams also posted her first game of the season scoring in double-figures.

NAU was scheduled to remain in Las Vegas for its final game of the UNLV Thanksgiving Turkey Tip-Off against Creighton on Friday afternoon.


**STAYSON ISOBE and MAXWELL NAGLE** of NAU Sports Information contributed to this roundup.



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