

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

# Running is a powerful way to slow down in the holiday season

BY RACHEL SMITH  
Special to the Daily Sun

The holiday season is often described as magical, but depending on your stage of life, plans and responsibilities, it can also be pretty dang chaotic! For many people the holidays can feel overwhelming by a familiar rush — lists to complete, gatherings to prepare for, expectations to meet. It becomes a time when we’re pulled in a dozen different directions, all while trying to hold onto some sense of peace. It might feel counterintuitive to squeeze another thing into a day, i.e. running, but yet, in the midst of all the busyness, running offers a steadying counterbalance to the chaos. It becomes more than exercise — it becomes a grounding ritual helping us cultivate gratitude and reconnect with a feeling of “slowing down,” even as the world around us speeds up. Running through the holidays creates intentional pauses in days that are otherwise full. Lacing up and stepping outside — whether into crisp

morning air or the soft glow of early evening lights — creates a small moment of separation from the noise and urgency of the season. The rhythm of footfall, breath and movement becomes a meditative pattern, one that invites the mind to quiet down. With each mile or minute, the list of holiday tasks fades to the background, and what’s left is a clearer awareness of the present moment. In a season defined by rushing, running becomes an act of deliberate slowness, a choice to reset the pace. Hopefully, this shift in pace also encourages gratitude by giving greater perspective. Holiday stress often comes from feeling stretched thin — worrying about doing enough, giving enough and being enough. Running becomes a reminder that gratitude isn’t always about grand gestures or doing it all; sometimes it’s just about appreciating simple, steady effort. Ultimately, running through the holidays teaches us that slowing down isn’t always about stillness. Sometimes it’s about finding a rhythm that

brings us back into ourselves. And gratitude isn’t always something we have to reach for — sometimes it arrives naturally when we give ourselves the gift of time, breath and movement. In a season that asks so much of us, running gives something back: clarity, calm and a deeper appreciation for the moments that matter. Along with enhancing gratitude and sanity, running through the holidays might make you feel a little less guilty about indulging in all those irresistible treats, feel like you’re a step ahead of all the exercise-in-the-New-Year-resolution-setters, appreciate festive scenery in the neighborhood, and even help you sleep better! Wishing you calm in the chaos, many joyful runs and gatherings, lots of moments of genuine gratitude and the happiest of holidays! **Rachel Smith is a mom of 2, professional runner and treat-lover. She is also the coordinating editor of this column and would encourage you to send articles to her email at [rachschneid18@gmail.com](mailto:rachschneid18@gmail.com).**



COURTESY

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## LUMBERJACKS

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shooting night for the hosts. “Arne needs to shoot more 3s,” Burcar said. “He made our first two. Arne needs to get more physical. He has to play off two feet, and he’s very skilled.” NAU shot below 30% from distance for the third time in its seven games so far, going 7 for 24. Sayler closed the gap on NAU’s lead to one on a three leading into a media timeout. He gave the Jackrabbits the lead on a 3 right after the short break to make it 18-16. South Dakota State never relinquished the lead for the remaining 30 minutes. Free throws also came at a premium. Neither team attempted a foul shot until the Jackrabbits finally drew a shooting foul with 8:50 remaining in the first half. Free throws remained one of the Lumberjacks’ biggest Achilles heels. NAU went 1 for 4 from the line in the entire first half. A few bad fouls sent South Dakota State to the line five times in the final 61 seconds before halftime alone.



KYLIE KNIGHT, NAU ATHLETICS

Northern Arizona forward Zack Davidson (5) and guard Kavon Bradford (22) leap for a rebound during a game against South Dakota State Wednesday at Rolle Activity Center.

Entering ranked 350th out of 361 Division I teams with a 61.7 free-throw percentage, NAU still shot below that clip, going 11 of 19 from the charity stripe (57.9%). Redshirt sophomore Zach Davidson, who only trailed Osojnik with 11 points, missed three of his four foul shots. Burcar said the free-throw line played a role in the loss and the lack of attempts in the first half really cost them. “If you have 10 turnovers, you’re down 10 and you have

four free throws, it tells you that you had a soft 20 minutes,” Burcar said. Abelman, who reset his career high with two 20-point games last week, scored just nine points on 3-for-12 shooting. He was 1 for 6 from deep. NAU trailed 36-26 at halftime after allowing 10 of its 13 turnovers in the opening 20 minutes. Burcar said some tough conversations occurred at halftime and after the game. “We talked about how other people in our industry think of

us,” Burcar said. “The only way you’re going to get better and win a conference championship and go to the NCAA Tournament is think highly of yourself and go and compete. We simply weren’t good enough tonight to do that.” South Dakota State kept the momentum going right out of the locker room with a 5-0 burst in the first minute. The visitor’s bench did a lot of heavy lifting by outscoring NAU’s bench 28-11. Wilkinson put up 13 points, while junior guard Luke Haertle added 11 off the bench. A size advantage for the Jackrabbits led to a 41-33 rebound differential, including a 12-7 difference in offensive boards. Lumberjacks forward Traivar Jackson, one of the team’s leading rebounders, dealt with foul trouble early in the second half and ultimately fouled out with over two minutes remaining. “Usually, we’re one of the better rebounding teams,” Burcar said. “We take pride in that. They have good size, but we’re going to watch film, and it’s going to be because we didn’t screen their guys out. We stood there and tried to win a

jumping contest. Our guys, with the exception of Traivar, are not going to win a jumping contest.” Abelman also had to play conservatively after picking up his third foul at the 14:03 mark. The Jackrabbits didn’t hit a field goal in the final 6:38 of the game after Sayler’s final 3. South Dakota State went 8 for 10 at the foul line from that point on to put the game away. Their 18 made free throws were the most since hitting 20 in the season opener against Merrimack. South Dakota State (5-4) snapped a two-game losing streak. The Jackrabbits will look to go perfect in the Big Sky-Summit League Challenge with a win at home against Idaho on Saturday. NAU (4-3) had its three-game winning streak come to an end. The Lumberjacks will try for their first-ever road win during the interconference challenge Saturday against North Dakota State in Fargo to begin a three-game road trip. NAU will be back at home on Dec. 18 against future Big Sky Conference foe Southern Utah in the Skydome at 5 p.m.

## PANTHERS

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Coconino student section throughout the game. Sophomore guard Daryl Little finished with five points and eight rebounds to lead a young Titans team with only two seniors listed on the roster. Junior Joel Fungafatt chipped in with five points as well, and junior Brennan Lick pulled down seven boards.

Panthers center Oryon Huayhuala was the fourth Panther to reach double figures in scoring with 13 points. He also added two steals, contributing to many forced turnovers. The Panthers played four full quarters of physical defense, swarming the Titans’ ball handlers and not giving them easy looks in the paint. Coconino did not let off the gas at all until the final minutes of the fourth quarter, despite being at the end of back-to-back nights of play.

“We have to be able to face adversity,” Elliot said. “We played a tough Cactus team last night, and Thunderbird is a historic program.” Thunderbird was scheduled to face another Grand Canyon Region opponent in the Mingus Union Marauders at home to conclude its back-to-back stretch on Thursday. Coconino (3-0) has a four-day break before traveling to Glendale to face the Deer Valley Skyhawks on Monday.



PHOTOS BY HATTIE LOPER, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

Coconino’s Fitz Guinan (20) passes while on the move during a game against Thunderbird on Wednesday at Coconino High School.



Coconino’s Kris Kelly (11) looks for an opening during a game against Thunderbird on Wednesday at Coconino High School.



Coconino’s Hashke Nelson (2) drives the ball up the court during a game against Thunderbird on Wednesday at Coconino High School.