

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Racing medals and chasing personal bests

BY BIANCA LUEDEKER
Special to the Daily Sun

Racing medals: all runners have them, but what can we do with them? Do you have them on display in your house or, like me, stored in a box in the garage?

Growing up, entering items into the Coconino County Fair was a big deal. This year, I decided to combine my love of fair entries and racing — I entered my collection of finisher medals in the hobbies and collections department. Much to my surprise, I won a runner-up Best of Show ribbon.

Displaying all my medals gave me the chance to reflect on my story as a runner. I am a very competitive person but an incredibly middle-of-the-pack runner. I still cannot stop entering races, spurred on by the opportunity to set a new personal best, if only by a second.

My love of running began in fifth grade when my friends convinced me to join the cross-country team. The first two years I performed poorly, hardly able to run a mile. One day, after the season wrapped, my neighboring classmate and I decided to run the usual training loop for fun. Strangely, when we reached the end, we both wanted to run it again. And we did! We could not believe we could run double what we usually considered a difficult practice. It was then that I feel I truly became a runner.

I started running recreational races in my 20s. My first 10K was a point-to-point from Camp Verde to Montezuma's Castle. I was not fast, but I was the only participant in my age class. I won my first first-place medal (yup, one out of one) and a hat depicting the castle. I felt invinci-

ble being able to travel such a distance on my own two feet. I quickly set my sights on running a marathon.

When I started training, I had not run more than 3 miles continuously. Luckily, I had a plan. Every time I completed a long run, I treated myself to a Cadbury Creme Egg and as much coffee as I

liked. Good ol' operant conditioning.

After a while, I once again hit a turning point in my career as I no longer needed the sweets. The reward for running was running itself. I ran my first marathon at age 24, finishing in nearly last place with a time of 5:49:50, but I placed third in my age class

and won a medal. You guessed it: there were only three racers in my age class.

If I had any advice to give to an average runner like me, it is that experience trumps youth. This year, at age 42, after retiring from marathons having only done the one nearly two decades before, I ran my second. I fin-

ished in a time of 4:37.

One of my favorite medals, a carved wooden one celebrating the 100th anniversary of Route 66, also represents improvement over time. This time in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon, over a challenging course, I was able to shave off 32 minutes after a 19-year hiatus.

Don't ever stop chasing your personal best.



The author poses with her runner-up Best of Show ribbon in front of her racing medal collection at this year's Coconino County Fair.

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losses. The Eagles will be back for their final regular season home match against Coconino (6-9, 3-5 4A Grand Canyon) on Monday at 6 p.m. at War Memorial Gymnasium.

Lee Williams (9-6, 4-4 4A Grand Canyon) will look to hold onto one of the last postseason spots, starting on Monday against the Badgers in Prescott before a crucial regular season finale at Coconino on Oct. 29.

Panthers 3, Marauders 1

The No. 27 Coconino Panthers snapped a season-long four-match losing streak in a 3-1 home win over No. 34 Mingus Union at Roth Athletic Center, 20-25, 26-24, 25-21, 25-17.

Coconino grew stronger each set and took command when the second set went to extra points. The Panthers avoided trailing by two sets and allowed fewer points each subsequent set. Coconino completed the season sweep

over Mingus Union, coming up with the same set score on Sept. 29 in Cottonwood.

Mingus Union (4-11, 0-8 4A Grand Canyon) lost its sixth straight match with two matches left in its season. The Marauders will play their final road match on Monday against No. 36 Bradshaw Mountain in Prescott Valley.

Coconino (6-9, 3-5 4A Grand Canyon) avoided a loss that would have given it a big hit in the conference standings. The Panthers have two matches left to move

up into a state play-in spot in the top 24. Their best chance to move up will be next time out when they play No. 13 Flagstaff on Monday at 6 p.m. at War Memorial Gymnasium. Flagstaff swept Coconino on the road across town on Oct. 14.

Yetis 3, Wildcats 1

In a 1A top-10 ranked battle, No. 5 BASIS Flagstaff took a crucial region win over No. 9 Joseph City in four sets, 25-13, 20-25, 25-20, 25-21. The win put Yetis in second place in the 1A

Central Region standings with two region matches remaining.

BASIS Flagstaff's record-breaking season reached another milestone on Thursday, giving the program its all-time best 14th win in a season. The Yetis had a similar outing earlier in the week against Williams, also winning in four sets.

Joseph City (10-5, 6-1 1A Central) suffered its first region loss and had its streak of six straight sweeps snapped. The Wildcats are right on the edge of hosting a

first-round state tournament match. They have a chance to even the region standings against No. 6 Mogollon (12-4, 8-0 1A Central) on Monday in Heber.

BASIS Flagstaff (14-1, 6-1 1A Central) now owns the region tie-breaker with Joseph City. It was set to face Wickenburg (3-11, 1-9 2A West) on Friday. The Yetis will play their final road match on Monday against Ash Fork (9-4, 4-3 1A Central). Ash Fork will be the site of the 1A Central Region Tournament on Oct. 30.

COCOININO
COUNTY ARIZONA

OCTOBER 27TH
IS THE LAST DAY TO MAIL
YOUR EARLY BALLOT

A brown ballot drop box with a slot at the top labeled "INSERT BALLOT HERE". The front panel features the Coconino County logo, a checkmark, and the text "OFFICIAL BALLOT DROP BOX".

We recommend that early voters returning their ballots through the U.S. Postal System mail them **no later than October 27th**. After the 27th early voters should drop their ballots off in a **ballot drop box**, at an **early voting site** or at a **polling location on Election Day**.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT EARLY VOTING

928-679-7860

VOTERSERVICES@COCOININO.AZ.GOV

coconino.az.gov/elections

The image shows the Coconino County Arizona logo, which includes a stylized mountain and sun icon to the left of the text "COCONINO COUNTY ARIZONA". The logo is centered within a horizontal banner that features a dark blue background with white stars on either side. Below the banner, the text "TRACK YOUR EARLY BALLOT" is written in large, bold, red capital letters. Underneath this, the phrase "Trust That Your Vote Counts!" is displayed in bold black text. A paragraph of black text follows, stating: "Sign-up for BALLOTTRAX, Arizona's official site to track, view, and receive messages about the status of your early ballot." Below the paragraph, the website address "trackmyballot.azsos.gov/voter" is written in a large, bold, dark blue font. At the bottom of the image, a dark blue banner contains the text "FOR MORE INFO" in white, followed by "CALL 928-679-7860 or EMAIL VOTERSERVICES@COCONINO.AZ.GOV" in white capital letters.