

## HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

## Running Series glides into its 3rd decade with new challenge

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB  
Special to the Daily Sun

As the temperatures increasingly warm up, I'm increasingly excited for the 2025 edition of the Flagstaff Running Series.

The Series, consisting of five races of varying distance, spans the summer months and has a long tradition of combining fun and fitness for our community. This year marks the 21st running of the Series, which heads into its third decade with support and sponsorship from Loven Contracting. Per usual, participants will receive a new, colorful rendition of last year's turquoise Series running socks, and those who run four of the five races will earn a well-deserved Pizzicetta pizza.

New for this year is the "Badges and Hoses Challenge." Many of you may remember that last year Officer Adam Williams ran many of the races in his full uniform. About a month ago, Adam emailed me about how he'd like to voluntarily organize a first responder challenge that has morphed to include anyone who would like to support



Officer Adam Williams participates in a Flagstaff Summer Series while donning his uniform. Neil Wentraub co-founded the Flagstaff Summer Series in 2005 and has voluntarily organized it ever since, with the priceless assistance of Run Flagstaff's Vince Sherry and Gail Hughes.

either team — Team Blue (Flagstaff Police Department) or Team Red (Flagstaff Fire Department/EMS).

On dreaming up the new challenge, Adam said: "Bodily fitness is an essential tool for anyone looking to

maintain a balanced, healthy life regardless of their occupation. We are all in this race of life together. What

### THE DATES FOR THIS YEAR'S SERIES ARE:

**June 21:** Northland Hospice Run for Life 10K/5K/Kids Dash  
**July 4:** Team Run Flagstaff Downtown Mile and Kids Dash  
**July 12:** Hopi Footprints 10K/2-mile/Kids Dash  
**Aug. 2:** Machine Solutions Soldiers Trail Run 10K/5K/Kids Dash  
**Aug. 9:** Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff Half Marathon/5K/Kids Dash

better way is there to promote healthy living and community than to highlight the healthy habits of those who put their community first? Plus, it doesn't hurt to have a little competitive fun and raise money for charity along the way."

When you register for the Series, you can opt to join the blue or red team. With support from our Run Flagstaff database guru Gail Hughes, Adam will track participation numbers and score the top five runners on each team at each race's longest course. All details can be found on the Badges and Hoses menu option on the Series RunSignUp registration page.

While most race registration prices have increased with sky-rocketing supply costs for event directors, I am proud to be

able to keep the 2025 Series pricing the same for either the short- or long-course packages. While Series registration is open until June 15, the best value for the five races is \$175 (either short or long), and \$125 for students (ages 18 and younger) through March 12. The Kid's Dash package is \$50 at all times. While you can register for races individually, signing up for the package early is a great value, especially if you plan on running at least four of the five.

Registering is easy. Once you check out, you're registered for all five races. Each individual race offers its published categories, awards and swag.

Along with learning more about the Series, you can see the ever-growing Northern Arizona Racing Calendar and its 32 race events on [natra.org](http://natra.org).

## RUNNING

FROM PAGE 1

and didn't finish the race. The team tried to get him into a 5K to hit a qualifier, but he couldn't get to the start line. So he had an MRI done and found out that there was a partial tear in his Achilles tendon. He met with a specialist, who told him that Haglund's surgery would be needed.

Day — who is now 28 — said he had his first Haglund's surgery on Sept. 10, 2021, and was able to come off it well and get into rehab. But in May of 2022, he began experiencing pain in the same area of the same foot, and he soon went to see another specialist. Again, he was told he would need the surgery — and this time more work would have to be done on the foot.

On Feb. 24, 2022, he underwent the second

surgery. The rehab and healing took longer, he said. He began noticing a bump when he finally began training again. Turns out he had a spitting suture that had not dissolved and was trying to come out of his body through his ankle line. The foot became infected, and he had to have another surgery to fix the issue.

Finally, after being sidelined for the entirety of 2021, 2022 and 2023, Day was ready to race. He ran the George Kyte Invitational as a welcome back race on Aug. 31, 2024, at Buffalo Park.

He said it has been a roller-coaster ride emotionally trying to get back to running at full speed.

"There are things I still struggle with now that I am fully healed. I mean my Achilles has been doing great, and my body has been doing somewhat great going through what I've

been going through, but there are times where I go, 'Man, I wish I would have done that better,' or, 'I wish I would have handled this better,'" he said. "But, again, that's me fretting on the past, and I'm just trying to move forward."

Moving forward has proved difficult for Day as he works to get back into game shape. He ran the Medtronic Twin Cities 10 Mile in October of last year, and caught the injury bug again, but not as badly, suffering a stress reaction in his hip.

And his Mesa 10K outing on Feb. 8 was humbling. He placed eighth with a time of 29:25, battling toward the finish line where his teammate and winner of the 10K, Ahmed Muhumed, waited. He said he was part of a group of eight elite runners who train in Flagstaff taking on the 10K. That group had a race going within the race, and he was last for

most of the time in the group. He said he was "on an island the entire time."

"It was super frustrating," Day said, "because I had never really found myself in that position, and I think in my mind, you know, one is that it's my ego talking, especially when it comes to running."

Not letting his ego take over is now a challenge as he tries to get back into a higher level of fitness. He admitted that he is now in a frustrating time of getting whooped by his teammates at practice while trying to remember all the gains he has made over the last few months.

"This is a good exercise for Tyler to really queue into an internal scorecard more than the external," NAZ Elite head coach Jack Mullaney said of Day racing this weekend. "Rather than look at the place or the time of the finish,

look at where you were a year ago, look at where you were six months ago, look at where you were three months ago, and look at where you are now. Taking steps in the right direction is the scorecard we want to worry about now."

Overall, Day has the green light to run hard Sunday.

"What you always try to do as a coach is assess the fitness level that the athlete is in and then construct a race plan that allows them to finish as high as possible in a race," Mullaney said.

NAZ Elite's coaching staff wants Day to get out and race during this process of getting back to where he once was as a runner. They feel it's the better option as opposed to limiting his build back to training sessions only.

"And really what you want to do is make sure the tactics are coming back, the mindset around racing is com-

ing back, so when his fitness arrives, there's not anything else that needs to be developed," Mullaney said. "That is a key piece to us for continuing to have him race throughout this process and to get him back into the rhythm of doing that."

Day has been training with Muhumed, who is also in Sunday's championship race.

"He's been nothing but supportive," Day said. "Especially on days when I get down on myself or I'm not keeping up with him on the short stuff, he'll be like, 'Hey, keep your head up.'" I've always had great teammates like that."

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## NAU

FROM PAGE 1

heading into tonight's game. On the road this year, the team is 10-5 and is coming off a road sweep at Idaho and Eastern Washington last week.

Northern Colorado is 13-14 on the season and 6-10 in conference play, most recently falling to Idaho on the road last Saturday. The Bears lead the all-time series, 24-17, but the Lumberjacks have won eight-straight over Northern Colorado and three straight in Greeley. In the first matchup this year in Flagstaff, Northern Arizona won 68-52.

As a team, UNC averages 61.0 points per game and allows 60.7 to rank third in the Big Sky.

### Men's basketball

Northern Arizona (16-13, 7-9 Big Sky) is heading into a crucial three-day stretch as the regular season winds down with Senior Night tonight in Flagstaff followed by a Monday night meeting in Pocatello to close the regular-season slate. Northern Arizona will host Northern Colorado (21-8, 13-3) for an 8 p.m. start at in the Walkup Skydome before going to take on the Idaho State Bengals (14-13, 9-7) on Monday on the road.

The Lumberjacks will honor seniors Jayden Jackson and Trent McLaughlin on Saturday evening ahead of tipoff.

Jackson joined the Lumberjacks in 2021, and has recorded 64 starts in 79 appearances, averaging 9.3 points per game while playing

a huge role in the team culture.

Joining Northern Arizona basketball in 2022, McLaughlin has appeared in 97 games for the team, making 72 starts, and currently averages 21.7 points per game to rank fourth in Division I hoops. He became the 33rd member of the 1,000 point club with a 26-point victory over Southern Utah in December, and has scored 1,352 career points with the Lumberjacks.

Currently seeded fifth in Big Sky standings, the Lumberjacks have two opportunities to move up while taking on second-seeded Northern Colorado today and fourth-seeded ISU on Monday. Northern Arizona is coming off a 20-point victory over Eastern Washington, led by 23 points from

McLaughlin as NAU extended its win streak over the Eagles to three straight.

Northern Arizona is shooting 48.4% from the field through the last three contests, coming off its season best of 61.8% from the field. The Lumberjacks continue to lead the league in rebounds, averaging 38.7 per game as a team.

A 17-win season would mark the best under head coach Shane Burcar, besting his interim season record of 16-14 in 2019-20.

Carson Towt continues to lead the nation in rebounds, ranking second overall with 12.4 boards per game as he sits in fourth in double-double performances with 18.

Northern Colorado, trailing first place in the conference by a half game, is seeking two victories to secure

15 conference wins in the regular season — which would match the most since the 2019-20 campaign.

The Bengals are heading into the week on a three-game win streak, with a Saturday night matchup facing Eastern Washington coming first.

### Men's tennis

Northern Arizona will play in its first Big Sky Conference match today against the Portland State Vikings.

Northern Arizona is heading into today's matchup with a 5-4 record. The team is currently 5-0 at home but 0-4 on the road. However, NAU is coming into this match with a two-match win streak off a doubleheader on Feb. 16, when it beat UC San Diego, 4-0 and won against Western New

Mexico, 6-1.

Dani Torres, Jakub Prachar, Takumi Katsuda and Pitor Galus all have winning records in singles for the Lumberjacks. Torres currently has a 5-2 record at the No. 1 spot in the lineup.

Semen Agynskyy is coming off two strong performances against UC San Diego and Western New Mexico. He blanked his opponent from the Tritons, 6-0, 6-0, then beat the No. 3 player from the Mustangs, 6-0, 6-2.

As a team, the Lumberjacks will be looking to make it their fifth year in a row where they open Big Sky play with a win.

Northern Arizona has beaten the Vikings the last four years, including a 7-0 sweep in 2024. In that match, Torres, Prachar and Agynskyy picked up singles wins.