HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

26th Soulstice matches 2 competitors 75 years apart in age

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
Special to the Daily Sun

Last weekend, when the 26th Soulstice Mountain Jackie Weintraub Trail Run featured its inaugural 30K, I guessed this column would chronicle how Flagstaff Olympian Rachel Smith, racing the longest distance of her storied career, would outright win the race.

Shortly after Rachel bolted from the start on her way to setting the new 30K's standard of 2:01:15, I had to return to the Little Pup Ranch, our epic race headquarters, to kick off the Kid's Dash. I quickly noticed one of the kids avoiding the group. When I asked if he wanted to run the dash, he looked at me very seriously and said, "No, I'm racing in the 10K!" Much to my delight, I was meeting Soulstice's youngest competitor ever: 9-year-old Max Del Bonis.

As I called faster racers to the front of the 18K and 10K Run Flagstaff starting line, Max confidently headed my way. After my announcements, I noticed 84-year-old Nat White toward the back of the pack, and I realized Soulstice had its oldest and youngest competitors ever going head-to-head. I spontaneously called them up for a prerace picture and then asked Max who is going to win the race. He looked at me and Nat, smiled, pounded his chest and simply stated: "me!"

In the Max-versus-Nat duel, the 9-year-old's 1:15:45 bested the 84-year-old's amazing 1:16:45. On racing against Max, Nat said: "I ran the race I wanted to run. At the Aspen Sports 5K turnaround aid station, I could see him slightly ahead of me. We both used a walk/run strategy, but I couldn't seem to catch up to him."

Regarding Soulstice, Max said: "The race was hard, but it was really fun. I liked the Skratch (electrolyte) drink in the middle of the race. Also in the middle, when my legs got tired and I wanted to quit, my mom helped to motivate me with positive words, and she told me to keep talking to my legs, telling them that they were strong and that I was gonna make it. Plus, I decided that I couldn't come in after Nat, so I just kept repeating those things to myself. I'm glad it was flat, but it was the longest race I've run. The party at the end was awesome, and I loved the hot dogs and the massage!"

Max's mom, Valen, told me that he enjoyed the race so much that next year he plans to run the 18K.

This year the Aspen Sports raffle, sponsors and runners raised nearly $12,000 for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff (BBBSF) youth mentoring programs. The 27th running of Soulstice takes place on Oct. 10, 2026, with registration for it opening on New Year's Eve.

If you'd like to get a jump on a free Soulstice registration, you can donate your Arizona Charitable Tax Credit to BBBSF at their Big Brunch fundraiser at Coconino Community College on Nov. 13 from 8:30 to 10 a.m. Visit natra.org for more details.

Neil Weintraub *voluntarily directs the activities of Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association (NATRA) and the Soulstice Mountain Trail Run. Next year's Soulstice race will mark NATRA's 25th birthday, so one thing is for sure: the postrace party will be over the top!*

Rachel Smith *is the coordinating editor for the High Country Running column. You can email her at rachschneid18@gmail.com to contribute to this column.*

COURTESY

Max Del Bonis, 9, poses with 84-year-old Nat White ahead of the Soulstice race start.

LOCAL

FROM PAGE 1

finished fifth and eighth in the 5000m. Freshman Eleanor Loeffler's 22:59 landed her in 23rd, followed by junior Lillian Loeffler (24:20) in 42nd and senior Claire Cunningham (25:05) in 55th. Freshman Ruby Plonsky (25:22) and freshman Abigale Johnson (26:14) rounded out the Spartans' entrants in 59th and 73rd.

Four Flagstaff runners finished within a minute of one another, led by junior Kaitlynn Goldtooth (22:03) in 12th. Junior Lillian Davis (22:14) finished 14th, followed by senior Valencia Timms (22:39) in 20th and sophomore Charlotte Plott (23:06) in 27th. Another three runners scored for the Eagles within a 27-second stretch as senior Katelynn Williams (23:30), freshman Lelilah Honwynewa (23:31) and freshman Merranda Cly (23:57) finished 29th, 30th and 36th respectively.

Flagstaff is scheduled to run next weekend at the 77th annual Mt. SAC Cross Country Invitational in Southern California Oct. 24-25. Northland Prep is scheduled to be off until Oct. 30, when it competes in the Verde Valley Invitational at Riverfront Park in Cottonwood.

Flag football
Eagles 24, Bears 0

Continuing its undefeated regular season on the road Thursday, Flagstaff (8-0, 2-0 4A Grand Canyon) recorded its sixth shutout of the season against Bradshaw Mountain (4-4, 1-2 4A Grand Canyon).

Now allowing just 2.9 points per game, the Eagles hold an average margin of victory at nearly 28 points per game. They have just four games left on their regular-season schedule, with three coming on their home field.

Flagstaff will host the Mohave Thunderbirds (1-5, 0-2 4A Grand Canyon) at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

Panthers 13, Sand Devils 6

Bouncing back from a loss to undefeated Mesquite at home on Tuesday, Coconino (7-2, 1-1 4A Grand Canyon) handed hosting Page (3-4, 1-0 3A North) a loss Thursday.

With just four games remaining in the regular season, Coconino will face four region opponents in the span of 11 days beginning next week. The Panthers will host the Prescott Badgers (6-0, 1-0 4A Grand Canyon) at 3:30 p.m. on Monday.

Volleyball
Badgers 3, Panthers 0

Coming closer to taking a set from No. 7 Prescott (11-1, 6-1 4A Grand Canyon) as the match went on, No. 37 Coconino (4-10, 2-7 4A Grand Canyon) was ultimately swept Wednesday night on the road.

The Panthers dropped the opening set 25-17, improving to 25-18 in the second set before the Badgers completed the sweep 25-22 in the third set. The loss, Coconino's sixth straight in Grand Canyon Region play, was the team's final regular-season match outside of Flagstaff this season.

Scheduled to compete at the Bulldog Girls Volleyball Tournament hosted by Barry Goldwater High School in the Valley on Friday and Saturday, Coconino returns to regular season play with a home match against the No. 44 Mohave Thunderbirds (1-13, 0-6 4A Grand Canyon) at 6 p.m. on Monday. The Thunderbirds have not won a set in eight consecutive matches, including a sweep by the Panthers in Bullhead City on Sept. 24.

Warriors 3, Yetis 0
Redskins 3, Yetis 1

Playing the first two matches of a three-match stretch across four days, No. 18 BASIS Flagstaff (9-6, 3-2 1A North) was swept by the No. 17 Tuba City Warriors (8-5, 6-2 3A North) on Wednesday and lost in four sets against No. 22 Red Mesa (8-6, 3-2 1A North) on Thursday.

Following a slow start against Tuba City, dropping the first two sets 25-9 and 25-11, BASIS Flagstaff pushed the third set to 25-23. During Thursday night's match, the Yetis opened up with a 25-19 win in the first set before falling 25-21, 25-17 and 25-14 for the loss.

BASIS Flagstaff will face the No. 13 El Capitan Eagles (7-5, 4-2 1A North) at home on Saturday with the match set for a noon start.

Boys Soccer
Scorpions 11, Yetis 0

Facing one of the top teams in the state during the fall soccer season, No. 24 BASIS Flagstaff fell to No. 4 Sedona Red Rock on the road Thursday night.

The Yetis were shut out for the third consecutive match, having last scored in a 3-2 loss to Grand Canyon on Sept. 24.

BASIS Flagstaff was scheduled to play against the Mo. 22 Highland Prep Honey Badgers (1-5, 0-3 Fall Central) on Friday at 7 p.m. before concluding its season at the No. 23 Holbrook Roadrunners (0-9, 0-5 Fall East) at 6 p.m. on Wednesday.