

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Mobility-challenged 11-year-old set to tackle the Soulstice Trail Run

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
Special to the Daily Sun

Shortly after last year’s Soulstice Mountain Trail Run, I joined my sister-in-law, Julie Silverman, for her first hike with the Luke5Adventures (L5A) Flagstaff Chapter. Diagnosed with ALS in 2025, Julie discovered that L5A is a local nonprofit dedicated to bringing the outdoors to those who may not otherwise have access across northern Arizona.

Since her diagnosis, I’ve joined Julie on two of her 4-mile adventure hikes, on the Aspen Trail and at Picture Canyon. I was amazed by how the volunteer sherpas carefully carried “Rosie,” a chariot-like adaptive chair, maneuvering Julie through the very rocky terrain of both trails. Along the way, I heard stories of sherpas even carry-



COURTESY

Olivia plans to tackle the Soulstice Mountain Trail Run on Oct. 10.

ing participants to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back! After hearing that, I felt Soulstice’s rocky Government Prairie 10K course would be a wonderful challenge for a Luke5Adventures participant in this year’s Oct. 10 race.

When I reached out to Flagstaff Chapter Director Maeona Moseley about the joint



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venture, she jumped at the idea. Little did I know, she had raced Soulstice in 2024. When Maeona sent out a group text seeking a rider a few weeks ago, Stephanie Bridegam of Holbrook grabbed the spot for her 11-year-old adoptive daughter, Olivia.

I learned from Stephanie that Olivia was prematurely born at 27 weeks when her biological mother had a severe car crash. The accident impacted her mom’s abdomen, and Olivia was born with complex hydrocephalus (which requires two shunts to manage), cortical blindness (she can basically see light and

dark), cerebral palsy and epilepsy. She was put in foster care around the age of 5, and Stephanie adopted her last December.

This past June, Olivia took her first L5A hike on Fort Tuthill’s Soldiers Trail loop, and, according to Stephanie, “I knew she loved the experience, because she smiled and made her happy sounds.” Between Olivia’s hikes with L5A and another nonprofit, Joni and Friends, the Soulstice Mountain Trail Run will be her fifth adventure.

If readers of this column know anyone with mobility challenges, are interested in participating as

a volunteer sherpa, or wish to support their mission, please visit their website at luke5adventures.org/chapters/flagstaff.

Along with Olivia’s participation and NATRA’s 25th anniversary party, we are also celebrating historic Route 66’s centennial. What does Route 66 have to do with Soulstice? Well, not only do participants access the race course by driving a mile along the Mother Road, but its historic apex in the country was at 7,400 feet, located just about a mile southeast of our beautiful Government Prairie course.

While the Soulstice’s Forest Service limit of

200 spots sold out in early August, we do have a waiting list you can join at runsignup.com/Race/AZ/Parks/SoulsticeMountainTrailRun. And if you miss out on the fun this year, you can always sign up for next year’s Oct. 9 Soulstice when registration opens for the 28th annual race on New Year’s Eve.

NEIL WEINTRAUB IS THE CO-FOUNDER OF NATRA AND WISHES TO THANK HIS SISTER-IN-LAW, JULIE SILVERMAN, FOR REVIEWING THIS COLUMN AND TO OLIVIA’S MOM, STEPHANIE BRIDEGAM, FOR SHARING OLIVIA’S STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS.

RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM TO TWO WONDERFUL GIRLS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER, AND FEELS LUCKY TO CALL FLAGSTAFF “HOME.” SHE IS ALSO THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN AND WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO IT BY SENDING YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY TO HER AT RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM.

LOCAL
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Flagstaff maintained its dominance in the Grand Canyon Region with its 26th straight region victory going back to 2023. The Eagles allowed just 30 points to the Marauders on Wednesday, winning 25-1, 25-21, 25-8, at War Memorial Gymnasium. The 30 points Flagstaff allowed were the third-fewest by an opponent this season. The Eagles allowed 21 points in their home opener against Tempe on Sept. 8, then 27 at

Washington just two days later.

The win also marked Flagstaff’s 12th straight sweep of Mingus Union. The last time the Marauders took a set against the Eagles was in October 2020 in Cottonwood. Flagstaff has swept Mingus Union in 24 of the last 25 head-to-head matchups and owns a 31-match winning streak in the series. Wednesday marked the fewest points Flagstaff has allowed from Mingus Union since holding the Marauders to 27 points in September

2024.

Flagstaff was swept on Thursday at Ironwood Ridge, 25-5, 25-11, 25-19. The Eagles improved each set, but were held to a season-low 35 points.

Ironwood Ridge (6-1, 4-0 4A Kino) will look to extend its winning streak to seven against ALA — Queen Creek (10-0, 5-0 4A East Sky) on Wednesday. Flagstaff (6-3, 2-0 4A Grand Canyon) will compete at the Epic Tournaments Girls Volleyball Invite hosted by Benjamin Franklin High School on Friday and Satur-

day. It will then play two straight home matches on Tuesday and Wednesday against Lee Williams, then Bradshaw Mountain. Both matches are set for 6 p.m. at War Memorial Gymnasium.

Badgers 3,
Panthers 2

Coconino’s three-match winning streak was snapped on Wednesday in its first five-set loss of the season against the Prescott Badgers, 25-13, 20-25, 25-22, 23-25, 15-12. The Panthers had yet to go five sets

against an opponent this year, while the Badgers are now 4-0 in matches that go the distance.

A sound Badgers’ win in the first set was followed by four sets all within five points at the end.

Senior Aiyana Leyva led Coconino with eight kills, followed by senior Paisley Rhoton with seven and sophomore Presley Padilla with six. Seven Coconino players combined for 33 total kills.

Senior Lucie Whiting ended with a career-high 33 digs, surpassing her previous

high of 29 in a five-set loss to Lee Williams last season. Whiting ended the night with 295 career digs and has 160 in this season alone. Leyva added 10 digs to reach exactly 100 for her career.

Prescott (5-5, 1-1 4A Grand Canyon) was also set to compete in the Epic Tournaments Girls Volleyball Invite over the weekend. Coconino (4-5, 1-1 4A Grand Canyon) will begin a three-match road trip on Tuesday at Mingus Union. The Panthers will be home next against Flagstaff on Oct. 14 at 6 p.m.

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