

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Humbled by the hills, but enjoying the hard climbs of Flagstaff’s BBBS Half

BY DAN SERBALIK
Special to the Daily Sun

I never thought I’d write about running. As a 40-year-old dad of two, I’ve never considered myself a “runner.” Between the military and a job in public safety, I’ve run quite a bit in my past — but always because I had to.

Running when nobody forces you to is a whole different ballgame. More recently, looking to push myself physically and mentally, I chose to take up running. Running has now become a place where I can focus, think, process and, ironically, relax. The challenge of grinding out a long run and then the feeling of accomplishment and excellent sleep that follow keep me coming back for more. Plus, running gives me the chance to demonstrate hard work, persistence and dedication to my kids.

For 2026, I committed to running a half-marathon every month. So far this year, I’ve run a few halves throughout Ar-

izona, and one each in California, Kansas and New York. I’ve got two more Arizona races, a Missouri and a Texas one to round out the calendar.

So far the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon, or BBBS Half, in Flagstaff in August has been the most challenging, and rewarding, half that I’ve run. I registered in January and had it on my mind all year.

Packet pickup at Fratelli’s was well-organized. The margherita pizza was the perfect carb load the night before a long run. After probably a little too much pizza, I made it back to my hotel and read the advice of race director Neil Weintraub for “Flatlanders” to consider power walking early on and thought, “Nah, I’ll be fine.”

I arrived at Thorpe Park to find a well-organized race area. Parking was great, the atmosphere was fun, and everyone had a smile on their face. The kids took off for their dash, and I got

ready to run.

Right on schedule, we stepped off onto the trail and began climbing. I immediately knew I was in for quite the day. At about 0.7 miles, I realized why the advice to walk was shared. The climb up the hill was unlike anything I’ve ever run. Over those first two uphill miles, I formed a newfound respect for those that trail run regularly.

Suffering up the first seven miles of the run, I took in the scenery and tried to enjoy the views. I stopped at each aid station, chatted with the volunteers, pretended I wasn’t hurting, and took pictures to share and enjoy later.

Once the elevation peaked and we started running downhill, I thought, “I might actually come do this again.” I even had an entertaining conversation with local runner Myles Schrag, who sheepishly told me his race tardiness story! The elevation is a challenge, the terrain is difficult, the organization is top-notch, and the cause is amazing.

Grinding through 13.1 miles with lots of other runners in Flagstaff was quite the experience.

Despite finishing around 20 minutes off my normal pace, which was also predicted by Neil, I’ve been raving about this race to anyone that will listen. I’ll be back next year with my kids to show them yet again that we can do hard things.

DAN SERBALIK IS A 40-YEAR-OLD HUSBAND AND DAD OF TWO KIDS, AGES 6 AND 8. FROM THE VALLEY, DAN HAS RUN ABOUT 15 HALF MARATHONS AND ONE FULL MARATHON SINCE STARTING RUNNING IN 2023. HE REGULARLY RUNS AROUND TEMPE TOWN LAKE, SO NOT QUITE THE ELEVATION OR TERRAIN OF FLAGSTAFF.

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.

PANTHERS
FROM PAGE B1

“We’ve been together from the start,” Gomez said. “We’ve had our ups and downs, but I feel like, at the end of the day, we have to come together and be here for our team. I think we bring the energy to both the offense and the defense, even if we’re on different pages.”

“We’ve had our ups and downs,” Roxas-Powers added. “We get frustrated if I call a play and she doesn’t run it the right way, or if I call a play and it doesn’t work out. We’ve had our ups and downs, but we always get back to what we need to do to get recentered mentally.”

The two bring out the best in each other and have come together for the betterment of the program. They share an understanding about the tough moments with each other.

Gomez has grown in her ability to call plays, even going as far as to change play calls before a snap. Plays against Sandra Day O’Connor’s defense showed that audibles may be needed. Stopping the pass rush was a struggle at times. The

coaching staff hopes to better prepare the team for more of that before the season starts.

Coconino returns a strong offensive core that also includes senior Kate Wesche, who led the Panthers with 74.6 receiving yards per game and 17 touchdowns. A college diving commit to the University of Utah, Wesche sees this last flag football season as an opportunity to grow in a team setting, something she is not used to doing in other sports.

“Last year was my first year,” Wesche said. “This is the first team sport I’ve ever played. It’s really cool to be part of a team and have people rely on you, and you rely on other people.”

Wesche and Gomez connected on a handful of big plays in the scrimmage, a sight to expect more of this year. Their connection goes back beyond football.

“We’ve been friends for a long time, so it’s been there, and it was there last year,” Wesche said. “We definitely developed that last year. I’m playing running back this year, which is different. I think we’re probably even closer now.”

The mix of returners and newcomers is exactly what the program needs to see for continued growth. Gomez sees a lot of potential in the new group to meet the standards of the rest of the team.

“We have a lot of returners, but we also have a lot of new ones,” Gomez said. “The newer ones have been putting in the work and everything. They make it look like they’ve been playing for a while.”

Wednesday’s scrimmage also saw a few other Panthers take some quarterback snaps, including Palmer. The junior saw limited time behind center last year; she came in to relieve Gomez in last year’s first-round postseason loss against Crismon. Roxas-Powers is already thinking about the program’s future after Gomez graduates this school year.

Palmer showed control in the pocket and even tucked the ball and ran for solid yardage at times on Wednesday.

“We have some depth finally,” Roxas-Powers said. “Sophie actually looked really poised and she made a lot of really good throws. Sometimes if

it wasn’t there, she made the proper read to run. Sophie has that IQ.”

A slew of new rule changes comes to the sport, not far removed from its infancy when the AIA introduced it in 2023. One notable change involves resuming play after a safety. Previously, the team that earned points from the safety began the next possession on offense at its own 30-yard line. This year, the team that allowed the safety will conduct a scrimmage kick from its own 20-yard line. The idea with this change is to provide the safety-causing team with significantly better field position, while also making it consistent with tackle football.

Teams will now also get three timeouts per half instead of two.

Coconino has 13 regular season games on its schedule, seven at home and six on the road. The Panthers had to begin last season with three straight road games before their first home game in October. The schedule flips for the Panthers this time around with three straight home out-

ings within the first week of the season. Coconino will open the year on Tuesday against Tuba City at Cromer Stadium. The homestand continues on Sept. 17 against Peoria before the region opener against Mingus Union on Sept. 21

The second half of the season could come back to haunt the Panthers. They will go on a four-game road stretch that will keep them away from Cromer Stadium for over three weeks in October. Getting to be comfortable at home early may be worth the lengthy trips in the heart of the season.

“I think building their confidence up for the first three at home, they can be a little more confident and hopefully we pull out some wins,” Roxas-Powers said.

Coconino will end the regular season by hosting the crosstown rivalry game against Flagstaff on Oct. 29 at 4 p.m. The Eagles won the matchup last season, 23-10. The all-time series is split, 1-1, in the time both schools have fielded a team. The home team has won each game so far in the head-to-head ledger.

Pregnant or postpartum & struggling with substance use?

You are not alone.

We provide compassionate substance use and mental health treatment during pregnancy and after birth. Our team is here to support you without judgement and help you take steps toward the future you want for yourself and your family.

Services:

- Case Management
 - Crisis Support
 - Baby Supplies
 - Therapy
 - Telehealth
- Perinatal Support
 - Medication
 - Medication Assisted Treatment
 - Recovery Support

Contact us at:
(928) 779-4550
FlagstaffOP@SBHServices.org



1515 E. Cedar Ave, Ste B-4
Flagstaff, AZ 86004

Delivering compassionate care to enhance lives and improve communities.

Funded by SAMHSA Grant 5H79TI087171-02. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of AHCCCS, HHS, or the U.S. Government. State Pilot Program for Treatment for Pregnant and Postpartum Women (PPW-PLT).

