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Keizer race walker pursues Olympic dreams

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Lydia McGranahan has always had a passion for being active.

The 42-year old Keizer resident loves backpacking, hiking and biking. She teaches water aerobics and spin classes at The Kroc Center in Salem and has also competed in triathlons in the past.

And in less than three years, McGranahan has turned that passion into becoming one of the best race walkers in the country.

On Sept. 30, 2018, McGranahan qualified for the 2020 U.S. Olympic Trials in the 50 Kilometer race walk by finishing her race in 5:08.16 at the Open & Masters Race Walk Championships in Owego, NY.

Just six months later, McGranahan also met the Olympic Trials time requirement for the 20K event at the Race Walk Championships in Tustin, Calif.

"It's blown me away how fast all of this happened," McGranahan said. "I honestly just keep surprising myself. I'm really driven and really determined."

"We all have different passions or things that we're interested in, and it's never too late to go after them."

McGranahan was first introduced to race walking in 2014 when her daughter, Mariah, who was 10 years old at the time, started competing in the sport at Salem Track Club.

In the summer of 2016, both McGranahan and her daughter were volunteers during the U.S. Olympic Trials race walking event, which took place in Salem.

Just months later, while

taking Mariah to a race walking coach in Portland, McGranahan was encouraged to just try it out for a few laps and soon discovered that she was matching Olympic qualifying time in her 200 meter intervals.

This piqued her curiosity, so McGranahan decided to enter into a 5K event in Portland.

"At this point, I didn't really know what I was getting myself into," McGranahan said.

However, her first race did not go as planned.

Early on in the race, one of the other runners took a spill. While trying to assist the woman to her feet, McGranahan suffered some nerve damage in her legs.

McGranahan continued to compete and even picked up her pace a little, but wound up falling and breaking her arm.

But she wasn't about to let this little hiccup prevent her from pursuing this sport further.

"I just kept playing around with it and having fun with it," McGranahan said.

After participating in a Portland to Coast race walking relay in the summer of 2017, teammates saw McGranahan's potential and encouraged her to attempt a 20K.

After weeks of consideration, McGranahan decided that she would give it a try.

"I was 40 years old. Who takes on a sport to that level at 40 years old?" McGrana-

han said. "But I'm wasn't getting any younger, so if I was going to attempt to do a 20K, I need to do it now."

In January of 2018, McGranahan flew down to San-tee, Calif. to compete in her first 20K and finished just a few minutes below Olympic Trials qualifying time.

Six months later, she was competing at a 20K in Des Moines IA, where she wound racing against some of the athletes she was assisting during the 2016 Olympic Trials.

"It blew me away. Here I was at the start line with some of the same athletes that I was handing sponges and water cups to two years ago. It never would have even crossed my mind two years ago," McGranahan said. "It was amazing."

With her success in the 20K, McGranahan decided to push herself even further by trying her first 50K in New York last September.

Despite not working with a trainer and having no experience with the 50K, McGranahan still finished well ahead of Olympic Trials qualifying time.

"At that point, I realized that I had some potential here and that I needed to take this a little more seriously," McGranahan said.

McGranahan decided to hire Erin Taylor-Talcott out of New York as her coach. Taylor-Talcott is quite famous in the race walking community for pushing for women to race walk with

"It's blown me away how fast all of this happened."

— Lydia McGranahan



Submitted

Lydia McGranahan lifts her arms in triumph after crossing the finish line at the 20K National Championships in March.

men in the 50K.

Taylor-Talcott writes up workout plans for McGranahan, as well as coaches her through video chats, emails and phone calls.

While there are challenges in maintaining a coach-athlete relationship across different time zones. The two are able to make it work.

"Coaching from afar would never work for non-motivated athletes, only the athletes who are self-motivated still thrive with a long distance coach," Taylor-Talcott said.

"I'm very fortunate with all the athletes I coach, they only come to me because they really want to improve,

so it's always a joy. I can't wait to see where Lydia will continue to go."

While qualifying for the 50K seemed like a lofty goal, McGranahan thought that meeting the 20K time would be even more difficult.

"In the back of my mind,

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Whiteaker track team takes both All-City crowns

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Scott Coburn has been coaching different sports at Whiteaker Middle School for nearly 30 years.

Last week, the Wolverines track and field squad was able to achieve something that had never happened in Coburn's tenure with the school.

After finishing the dual

season undefeated, both of Whiteaker's boys and girls teams won the All-City track meet at on Tuesday, May 14 at Sprague High School. The girls scored 146 points for the event and sent 18 athletes to the podium, while the boys team scored 125 points and had 15 athletes place.

"It was one of our most successful seasons of all time," Coburn said. "This

was a team that really pulled together and always supported each other. They showed a lot of heart this season."

"There is some natural, God-given talent on this team. Our kids were competing well at every grade level and in every event."

After not coming out for track last year, Lillian Besa concluded her incredibly successful season with a

victory in the discus with a throw of 84-feet-5-inches.

"She felt so so good about herself after she won all-city," Coburn said. "Lillian has been getting better all year and she just did a super job."

While Besa earned the lone victory for the Whiteaker girls, the rest of the squad was able to pile up a number of high finishes throughout the meet — the Wolverines

gained six second place finishes to go along with a trio of third place finishes.

Avery Buss placed second in the seventh-grade 100-meter race with a time of 14.12 seconds, and also finished second in the long jump with a new personal-best of 14-feet-10-inches.

Although she finished in third, Aspynn Westby broke the Whiteaker school record in the 1500m — which has stood for 14 years — with her personal-best time of 5:28.42.

"We just try and love our kids and encourage them to do the best that they possibly can, and the kids really have responded to that," Coburn said.

Coming into the meet, Whiteaker's boys seventh grade 4x100 relay team hadn't lost a race all season. But they sure made their final city race of the season an exciting one.

As the relay went into the final turn, the Wolverines were actually sitting in second, trailing Parrish. But Whiteaker anchor Pawat Potisuk took the baton from his twin brother, Pawit Potisuk, and caught Demari Thompson from behind, crossing the finish-line just two-tenths of a second ahead of the Parrish

sprinter, and bringing home the victory for Whiteaker.

"It was one of the most exciting races of the day," Coburn said. "People in the stands were jumping around. It was really cool to see those boys celebrate together."

Braiden Copeland was the only multiple-event winner for Whiteaker as he earned a pair of wins in both the long jump (16-11) and high jump (5-8).

"Braiden's athletic ability really showed on that day," Coburn said. "He showed calmness and stayed within himself, which was a big factor for him."

Whiteaker's other individual winner on the boys side was Darius Afalava, who was victorious in the sixth grade shot put (39.10.5).

While Coburn was very pleased with his team's success, he was also thrilled to share that 175 kids came out for the team this season, and almost all of them showed significant improvement.

"Throughout the season, we had kids improve from being one of the slowest kids on the team to being a middle-of-the-road kid on the track. That's a wonderful success too."

"It was one of our most successful seasons of all time."

— Scott Coburn



Submitted

From left to right: Cassius Hernandez, Ethan Wollangk, Pawit Potisuk and Pawat Potisuk show off their first place ribbons after winning the 7th grade boys 4x100 relay at the All-City meet on Tuesday, May 14.