

June 2014 - Featured Runner

Name: Jenna Barker

Age: 14

Occupation: Student

When and why did you start running?

I started running when I was about eight. My dad wanted to go for a run and I asked to join him. We went to the Richmond track and ran about two miles, even though it was sleeting. I haven't been able to stop ever since that first day.

Why do you run now?

There are many reasons for why I run now. The main reason is simply because I love it. Another important reason is because I want to see where running will take me in life. I have come a long way over the past few years and I would hate to throw all of my hard work away now. I also run because of the people. After a tedious day at school, I look forward to joining twenty of my teammates on the track for a hard workout. Running really is the best stress reliever there is.

What is your biggest running/fitness accomplishment so far?

Last summer, I had the opportunity to run at IUPUI at what is called Friday Night Lights. It is an outdoor track meet with only a select few events. It took place a week after the track and field state meet had occurred. Brittany and Bethany Neeley, two twin sisters who had won the 1600 and 800 at state, were also there. I ran the mile there and hit what is now my PR for that event, 5:21, even though I came in last. That was an amazing feeling, but it was even better knowing that I ran on the same track as two state champions. It was at that race where I realized that I am able compete with girls older than I am and who are also inches taller than I am. So I would say that my two biggest accomplishments come from that race; my 5:21 mile and my mental breakthrough.

What is your next running/fitness goal?

My short term goal is to break 5:09 for the mile this track season. It is Jack Brenneke's (a friend and non-related older brother of mine) junior high mile record and he claimed that I would not be able to break it while still in junior high. I am making it my mission to prove him wrong. I would also love to qualify for the state meet this fall in cross country. I also have a few long term goals. Although qualifying for a state meet sounds nice, a state title sounds even better. Hopefully in my upcoming four high school years, I'll be able to achieve that, in either cross country, track, or both. Running in college is another thing I am interested in.

Describe your typical running week.

My running week honestly depends on what time of the year it is, so I wouldn't really say I have a typical one. In the summer, I usually wake up at 4:30 a.m., run ten miles or so at 5:15 with the Early Risers, then head home and take a nice five hour long nap. This happens about three or four times during the summer. During cross country and track seasons, I have practice after school and a meet once or twice a week. Winter is my biggest off season. Don't ask me why, maybe it's the cold weather, but I am least motivated to run during the winter.

My one constant all throughout the year though, is 4:45 core class at Family Fitness every Monday. It provides constant humor and a good workout all within a half hour.

What other activities do you do to supplement your running?

Does sleep count?

What is your favorite running related snack/product/gadget?

I absolutely cannot live without my pink Oakleys. I take them just about everywhere with me. Another must-have is peanut butter protein bars from the Warehouse Cafe. I cannot even begin to tell you how much money I (or my loving father) have spent on those things.

What are your pre-race rituals?

Well, I'm big into motivational quotes. Before most races, I write a runner's name or a small quote on my hand in black sharpie. It's just something I look at before a race to remind myself of why I am on the starting line to begin with. Before all my races, I pray. Since I go to a Catholic school, praying is a big part of life, and I like to thank God for giving me the ability to run before each and every race.

How do you get through a tough run?

Ever since I started running, my dad has always told me that pain is temporary and pride is forever. That has really stuck with me over the years and when I'm struggling, I remind myself of that. When I do have a tough run, I lean on my coaches and teammates to help me get through it. One cross country race at Whitewater State Park, I was leading, took a wrong turn, and got lost. It is something I don't recommend. Once I got back on the right course and finished, I was a disaster. I soon learned that taking the wrong turn had cost my team the meet, but they all told me it didn't matter to them. They said that they could care less whether we won or lost, but me being okay and not injured is what really mattered. That helped me, knowing that there are people who I can lean on when not everything goes the way I want it to.

What is your favorite part about running?

Absolutely everything. I have met a ton of people through running and have become good

friends with a lot of them. Terry Yandl, John Dils, and Ken Wedig are what I call my “running dads” and I wouldn’t know them if it wasn’t for running. I especially enjoy morning runs with the Early Risers. Health benefits are a major plus. I also love the adrenaline rush before a race. There is no better feeling than stepping onto the start line with your heart hammering in your chest waiting for the gun to go off. The support is another major bonus. The encouragement between runners absolutely puts me in awe from time to time. It’s like everyone is one giant family.

How do you motivate yourself on days when you don’t want to run?

I tell myself that I have people who are counting on me and I can’t let them down. I know that if I want to be the best, then I’m going to have to train like the best. Years ago when I first started, I ran with Cecil Frankie and he told me that he always goes above and beyond on his training, that way the race is easier. I remember that quote on days when I don’t feel like getting a run in and remind myself that I’m only cheating myself. It also really helps having my coach (or more commonly referred to as my dad) living with me. I can always count on him to remind me of what is still out there if I am determined enough to pursue it.

Who is your running hero and why?

I look up to many people including Terry Yandl, Ken Wedig, Steve Hayes, and Jack Brenneke. All throughout the years those guys have never stopped believing in me and I thank them for that, but my hands down favorite running hero is my dad. If it wasn’t for him, I highly doubt I would even be filling this out right now. He got me out there for my first run and hasn’t left my side since then. Through thick or thin, rain or shine, he has constantly been my number one supporter. Whatever race it is, on some muddy cross country course or just a track, I hear his voice yelling for me above anyone else’s because it is really the only one I want to hear. Whether we are in Central Park after his NYC Marathon or at the Cardinal Greenway, every running adventure we go on together is unique. He once told me that during a tough race one time, he almost quit but then thought of me and kept going because he didn’t want to disappoint me. No matter where running takes me in life he’ll always be my favorite coach. Thanks Dad.

What is your biggest running-related pet peeve?

When people wear shorts over tights. You don’t wear a short sleeve shirt over a jacket, so why shorts over tights? I just don’t get it.

Are you a morning or evening runner?

Definitely a morning runner. Going back to bed after a long run is what I live for. I also love the feeling that I’m up running while the rest of the world is still sleeping, and that I got my run over with instead of procrastinating.

Are you a solo or a group runner?

Group. I've never really ever been on a solo run. Either I'm running with the Early Risers, or my teammates. I listen to other conversations while running to pass the time. I'm also not the best when it comes to directions and courses so running with people who know the correct route really helps.

What is your favorite type of run?

My best friend, Suzi Quigg, and I have these runs which we call "no judge runs." I'm not really sure how the name came to be about, but for a few weeks last summer we were both incredibly busy and the only time we could see each other was during early morning runs. We caught up on everything that had happened since we had last seen each other. Those slower, no pressure recovery runs with her always put me in a good mood for the rest of the day. She now attends a boarding school in Minnesota so we try to do our no judge runs whenever we can.

Fill in the blank:

I love running because it makes me a better person.

When I run I like to about a little bit of everything.

The hardest part of running is knowing that you are making progress even when you don't feel like you are.

The best running advice I ever received was running isn't supposed to look pretty. If you look like a disaster at the end of your run, then you know you ran it right.