

“ I was very shocked. I didn't think I was gonna win because I was up against some pretty good people, but I'm glad I did. That means I improved a lot throughout the offseason going into the season. ”
 CHARLOTTE HARDY | 10



“ You get nominated if you run a really good race that week. So I got nominated because I was the top Kansan at Chili Pepper festival and I PRed by 50 seconds. ”
 ELLA ASH | 10

TWO SOPHOMORE MEMBERS OF THE TEAM WON MILE SPLIT'S KANSAS RUNNER OF THE WEEK

DOUBLE VICTORY

UPPING THE HEAT

STORY BY JAMIE WILBORN
 DESIGN BY ELLIE BURGESS

SENIOR MASON SAJNA DROPS TIME AND BECOMES A LEADER ON THE TEAM



PLAYING CATCH-UP above Racing in the Haskell Invitational, sophomore William Meyer comes around the final corner trying to push ahead of his competitor. “I always see [the kid] next to me because he always starts out really fast, and he's ahead of me, and I always catch him at the end,” Meyer said. “I was able to put in a little bit of distance before and he wasn't able to catch me at the end. I beat him in one of the races near the end of the last year, but none of those before.” photo by Maggie Wells

KICKING IT FORWARD right At the regional competition, sophomore Aida Bruce speeds up to pass other runners before crossing the finish line. “I was at the end of the race, most people speed up so they can get to the finish line, it's called a kick,” Bruce said. “[The race] was a 5k so 3.1 miles. The regional course we had was not terribly difficult.” Bruce placed in the top 20. photo by Brynn Delaney



He only had one thought: putting one foot before the other. Senior Mason Sajna needed to be ready to withstand the Arkansas heat, and the date of the Chili Pepper XC Festival was nearing.

The flat neighborhood sidewalks in the Prairie Village suburbs that Sajna was used to would be replaced with the Fayetteville hills and forests at the Arkansas meet.

For Sajna, just thinking about the race made his mind scramble. Not only was the Chili Pepper XC Festival an out-of-state meet but it was also filled with talented, experienced runners – it was the meet of the year.

Sajna believed that this year was going to be different from the rest. Throughout the offseason of his senior season, Sajna ran 60-70 miles a week – about two runs a day.

“[Boys' head coach Rikki Hacker] saw in me that I had a passion for [running],” Sajna said. “I wanted to be fast, so [Hacker] decided that it would be best for me if I started running a ton.”

During his freshman year, Sajna started the season with a 5k time of 25:40, making him the slowest on the team. In his mind, his teammates saw him as someone who didn't take running seriously or care about the sport. However, Sajna realized he wanted to commit to cross country as more than just a throwaway after-school activity. He started putting in the time before and after school – always being the last to leave practice.

“When I started, I could barely run a mile,” Sajna said. “Now I'm fourth on the team based on times, and I've improved by about eight minutes [from] the first 5K I ran.”

After being on the C-team during his freshman and sophomore years, Sajna knew he had more potential. His junior year, when cross country teams came out, he scanned through the list, searching for his name. Then, in bold letters, the name Mason Sajna appeared – twice. JV Captain and varsity runner.

His hard work had paid off. Yet, his mindset

hadn't changed, he wanted to keep improving.

He kept that promise throughout his junior season – he needed to do more.

Sajna was so close to being officially a part of the 'varsity' group, but being the JV captain seemed to hold him back.

“It just felt like [the varsity guys] were looking down on me,” Sajna said. “That gave me motivation to be better because these guys were doubting me.”

This year, there were big shoes to fill, with the best runners graduating. Sajna started his senior season off strong, but it all came down to his results in the Chili Pepper XC Festival.

The Chili Pepper XC Festival lived up to its name. It was hot – scorching hot. But this didn't stop Sajna from placing in the top half of the competition. He was no longer the worst on the team, instead, he became one of the top five runners with a new 5K time of 17:41.



RUNNING BUDDIES above After a race, senior Anna Joyce and junior Claire Langford celebrate their growth throughout the season. “She's a really good friend of mine and she's always up in the front with me, leading the pack because she's one of our juniors and next year she's gonna help lead the team as a senior,” Joyce said. “We both have the same humor and we just get each other. I don't know how to explain it, but there's too many good memories to count.” photo by Ellie Moilanen



COOL DOWN middle To cool down during a workout at Porter Park, sophomore Jacob Lien takes his one-minute rest period. “Rests depends on the workout, so I'd say it's probably half the time you're running for,” Lien said. “Workouts are usually two miles, and then you'll do a certain number of reps with varying distances. We'll do like 300 repeats or model repeats. They're hard, but you feel accomplished after you finish.” photo by Ellie Moilanen



SECRETS AT STATE far right Sitting in the third seed at the state competition, junior Claire Langford chants in the warmup huddle wearing her state jacket to cover her uniform. “We tried to hide what uniforms we were in so people couldn't find us and pass us,” Langford said. “We wore the JV uniforms that had just come in and no one had worn them yet and debuted them. It was actually really funny. On the course the Olathe West coach was saying, “East is in blue! East is in blue!” because we're normally in white. She was freaking out.” The team placed third at state. photo by Charlotte Reintjes



“ HOW DID THE TEAM DYNAMIC CHANGE THIS SEASON LEAD TO SUCCESS? ”
 “After losing our number one senior last year, Anna Joyce really stepped up. We try to encourage each other to take as much pressure off as possible”
 CHLOE SWAN | 11