

Family, faith, first place



Robert O'Brien — THE BATTALION

Mid-distance runner Brandon Miller reflects on past success, future goals

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Life is often thought of as a race to the finish line. Mental and physical battles are fought, milestones are achieved and everyone tries to make the most of their time before reaching the end.

Sometimes, we focus too much on the finish line when we should focus on the journey of the race itself. Life is presented with distracting highs and lows, yet many choose to

focus on the purpose of the mission. For sophomore mid-distance runner Brandon Miller, his purpose is deeper than how quickly his feet can reach a thin white line.

Powered by his faith, family and love for competition, Miller's radiant personality and desire to leave a lasting impact on the world are displayed in his every action.

"Everybody loves Brandon," his mother Angela Miller said. "I have yet to meet anyone who had anything bad to say about him."

The blood flowing through Brandon's veins is a product of love and athletics. Before he was in the picture, his parents began their relationship in the unromantic presence of iron and muscle growth: the Missouri Tiger's

weight room. His father Derrick Miller, a defensive back on the football team, approached Angela, a short-distance hurdler, and they hit it off while conversing about Angela's event.

"I started going to the track meets to see her," Derrick said. "The rest is history."

After falling in love and getting married, the Millers decided to raise a family in St. Louis, Mo., where Brandon, his older brother D.J. and younger sister Ava grew up. At a young age, the Millers instilled an athletic intuition in their kids. Since their romance was born in the presence of a collegiate athletic facility, they made sure to introduce all different sports, Angela said.

"We had to put him and his brother in

sports to burn off some energy," Angela said. "[They were in] track, flag football, soccer, basketball and T-ball. [They] were natural athletes with a ton of energy."

From the moment Brandon felt the first breeze graze his face while running, he knew the track was his safe space. With his parents' encouragement behind him, success became a familiar feeling to Brandon.

"Ever since then, I haven't looked back," Brandon said. "I was blessed to experience a lot of success early on the track. Through high school, I was blessed to do pretty well my freshman and sophomore year[s]."

800-meter American Collegiate Record

2022 The Bowerman Preseason Watch List



All-time fourth-fastest American 800-meter

SEC titles in Indoor and Outdoor 800-meter

Then came Brandon's junior year of high school when he suffered a hamstring injury. He framed it as a minor setback, not letting it slow him down. During this time, he relied on his faith to carry him through the race of life. Since he achieved much success early in his career, he used the experience to reflect upon the other important segments of his life.

"That was a time in life where I was on top of the world one day and on the complete bottom the next," Brandon said. "I got back into my faith because I realized without God, nothing is possible. It humbled me, but it made me a better man."

Brandon's faith guided his road to recovery, and, before he knew it, his spikes were kissing the track once again.

As far as accomplishments go, Brandon shot for the stars and reached them. He placed first eight years in a row running the 800-meter at the AAU Junior Olympics, is a three-time state champion and earned all-district and all-state honors his freshman and sophomore seasons in high school. Further, Brandon was named the 2020 Missouri Gatorade Track and Field Athlete of the Year.

"Brandon is a student of the game," Derrick said. "He studies track and field. He doesn't leave it up to his natural ability and talent. He wants to study his competition and visualize himself already winning."

His senior year, the day came that every wishful athlete dreams about: college decision day. Although many colleges like Penn State, Iowa State, Mississippi State and Oregon begged for his attention, Brandon said he knew suiting up in maroon and white every meet would ultimately lead him to greatness in every aspect.

"The history of the 800 at A&M [led me here]," Brandon said. "You look at A&M and you see all the great 800-meter runners that came before [me] with Donavan Brazier, Devin Dixon, Carlton Orange and on the women's side as well. Also, the fact that I was training under coach [Pat] Henry, one of the greatest coaches of all time, and coach Milton Mallard. Who could say no to Texas A&M?"

The boy from St. Louis packed up his life and moved to College Station, a place where he said he knew all his hopes and dreams could come to life. Upon arrival, the central Texas humidity hugged him, and Brandon knew he was home. Over 950 miles away, his older brother D.J. was consumed with preparation for the 2021 football season at Iowa State. Although distance separates the two, the brothers are direct products of hard work and athletic genetics.

"Athletics is what we grew up on," Bran-

don said. "Me and my brother always had a dream of playing at the collegiate level and going professional in the sports that we picked."

The first time Brandon ran with "Texas A&M" written across his chest, it was just another meet for him. Many freshmen begin their college athletic careers with an abundance of nerves and fears, but Brandon didn't blink. At the 2021 Ted Nelson Invitational, those thoughts were stomped on as he flew past his opponents and reached the finish line in first place.

That moment sparked many first-place finishes and personal records for Brandon during his first year.

His times improved throughout the season, and the freshman stunned those who watched. At the indoor and outdoor SEC

"When you strive for perfection, you fall on excellence."

BRANDON MILLER,
MID-DISTANCE RUNNER

Championships, he placed first in both 800-meter races. At the meet, Brandon inked 1 Samuel 16:7, his favorite Bible verse, on his headband.

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart,'" the verse reads.

Brandon isn't the oldest. He isn't the tallest. He may not be the strongest. His frame misrepresents his mightiness.

"I like to put my faith in everything I do," Brandon said. "As [God's] children, I feel like we have a duty and calling to glorify Him in everything that we do. Me giving everything I have in a race would be glorifying Him."

With his Christian beliefs energizing his body, Brandon took home second place and a personal-best time of 1:44.97 in the 800-meter at the NCAA Outdoor Championship, but returned to College Station with one motivator on his mind — being the best. At the age of 19, he became the third-fastest American under 20 of all time.

In December of 2021, Brandon's development throughout the offseason was ready to be displayed at the season opener of the 2021-22 indoor slate. Waking up feeling a little under the weather, he picked up a camera and vlogged the entirety of his day, much like many other teenagers have.

However, on that same day, Brandon did something no other teenager has ever done before. He logged an under-20 world-best 600-meter time, which placed him as the sixth-fastest collegiate 600-meter runner of all time. He didn't even know it.

"I was actually going after the collegiate record, and I was so close, but I still ran a [personal best] so I was happy with that," Brandon said. "I was talking to my coach and he said, 'Man, that's a world junior record,' and I said, 'Oh, wow. I had no clue.' When you strive for perfection, you fall on excellence."

To kick off the new year, Brandon slipped on his best suit and was announced as one of 10 male runners on The Bowerman Preseason Watch List in 2022.

It is common for athletes with promising futures to let success steer them away from humility. However, Brandon's personality is as infectious as they come. Off the track, he is a 20-year-old who loves his dog Achilles, his pet snake Slick, eating pasta the day before meets and, from time to time, picking up a camera to share his day with the world on his YouTube channel.

"My mom bought me a camera and she told me, 'If I spend all this money buying a camera, you better start a YouTube [channel]," Brandon said. "I finally sat down, hit the record button and I haven't looked back since. It's been really fun taking people through the journey of the season, and I wanted people to know me as a person rather than just a track runner."

Brandon's love for sports carries far beyond his fondness of the track. Studying journalism, he intends to pursue a sports broadcasting career if his track career falls through. He knew by coming to A&M, the opportunities for growth would be endless.

In addition, his confidence and high standards he set for himself motivate him to demolish barriers not yet broken.

"I want to break the indoor and outdoor 800-meter collegiate record," Brandon said. "I'd like to think that I could be the best 800-meter runner to come out of A&M."

Just like any other athlete, Miller plays images of first-place medals and Olympic aspirations in his mind, but he also strives for a goal greater than himself — to leave this world better than he found it.

"I want to be an inspiration to people," Brandon said, "Lead them closer to God and show them they can do [anything], no matter how tall, short, skinny [or] fat."