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Wisconsin's Finest: Molly Seidel is on a mission to run fast

By Stephen Mazzone / October 25, 2010 8:58 PM

By STEPHEN MAZZONE

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Molly Seidel clearly recalls her first cross-country race as a ninth-grader at University Lake High. The Wisconsin runner had the background in track, but it was her inaugural time racing on the uneven terrain.

"I had no idea what to expect," she said. "I just remember it was pouring rain and there was mud all over the place, and I ended up winning it."

"Seidel not only won the four-kilometer (2.4 miles) race that early autumn day, she defeated the reigning state champion!"

"I just ran it like any other race," she said. "I didn't know what to do. I just ran it on instinct. I took the lead around a mile and just started pulling away."

Seidel's "surprising" debut to high school competition turned out to be a preview to a coming attraction because winning has simply become synonymous with the talented harrier ever since that first race.

And, right now, it doesn't appear as if it will ever stop. With a resume that already includes two cross-country state crowns and four more titles on the outdoor track surface, the now junior is on pace to add considerably more laurels to her already

successful career at University Lake, a small private (K-12) school in Hartland with an enrollment of less than 100 students in the high school.

This past Saturday, Seidel cruised to the individual title at the WIAA District 3 Kenosha St. Joseph Sectionals, winning with a personal-best time of 13 minutes, 42.40 seconds. She beat promising freshman and sister, Isabel Seidel, by nearly two minutes. Her younger sibling took the runner-up spot at 15:34.8.

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Seidel's performance at the Wayne Dannehal National Cross-Country Course in Parkside, Wis., one that earned her and her sister a qualifying spot at this weekend's WIAA state meet, continues her consistency this season for the 4K distance where her slowest time has been just over 14 minutes in the half-dozen races that she has competed in.

"It has just been awesome," she said. "I have been able to drop so much time from last year. It's good to see that all my hard work is paying off. I am training a bit smarter. I'm getting in more mileage. It also helps being a little older and getting the experience that I have had from the previous two years."

When you are Molly Seidel, dropping any time off your previous best is an achievement that should be deemed noteworthy. The 16-year-old runner, who has excelled in track since elementary school, has been nothing but sensational when she has a pair of racing flats on her feet. She's coming off a sophomore season where she repeated what she had done as a frosh, claiming her second straight cross-country title and also taking top honors in the 1,600- and 3,200-meter runs at the outdoor state meet.

With her laid-back approach and fierce competitiveness, Seidel has proven to be unbeatable. She has kept that trend this fall and estimates she has only been defeated "about five times" in cross country and track combined the last two-plus years.

Among some of the top races that Seidel has captured this season, along with her respective 4K times, are the Wisconsin Lutheran Invitational (13:44.39) on Oct. 8 in West Allis, the Midwest Invitational (13:55.5) on Sept. 25 in Janesville, and the Arrowhead Invitational (14:05) on Sept. 9 in her hometown of Hartland.

Currently, Seidel ranks No. 11 on the Milesplit national list.

"When I go into a race, I just always try and stay relaxed," she said. "I learned it doesn't help to get all worked-up and stressed. I try to go into a race as relaxed as I can be."

Seidel, who maintains a 4.0 GPA in her studies, lists her first state title in cross country as one of the high points of her career at University Lake. Then, of course, there was her big victory in the mile run at the Midwest Distance Gala in Illinois on June 12 where she beat an elite field and smashed her PB by nearly 10 seconds with an outstanding clocking of 4:52.63. She battled Kentucky's Emma Brink (second, 4:53.66) and Missouri's Colleen Quigley (third, 4:55.77) for much of that race and took the lead outright with half a lap remaining. "It was really cool winning the state title my freshmen year, but definitely one of the highlights was breaking five minutes for the mile," she said. "It really helped that there was a lot of competition at the Distance Gala. I just went into it going for that time. There was no stopping me."

"Going into this having never run a big national meet, I want to see how I can do," she said. "I'm thinking maybe top 20, maybe top 10. I am going to stay hopeful and just stick to my training and we'll see how it goes."

"We stayed one-two-three for the first three laps and the last 300 meters I passed (Quigley) and the last 200 meters I caught (Brink). Before the race, all three of us decided that we wanted to run that kind of time."

Seidel's outdoor track season last year, which included a PB of 10:39 for 3,200 at the states, and her win at the Distance Gala, was added motivation to step it up another level for her off-season training. She averaged about 35-40 miles per week during the hot months and also incorporated cross-training into her workouts, such as kayaking, swimming and deep-water running.

"I just worked really hard all summer so that I could really hit better times this year," Seidel said. "After this past track season, I knew I could hit these times (in cross country)."

Seidel will be on the starting line this Saturday for the WIAA State Cross-Country Championships at Ridges Golf Course in Wisconsin Rapids where she will be gunning for individual title No. 3. She's then hoping to compete in the Foot Locker Nationals in San

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Diego on Dec. 11.

If she does make it past the Midwest Regionals in Kenosha on Nov. 27 to earn her ticket out west, something that would seem inevitable, it will be her first time competing in a national championship. The two meets will also be a rare time that she has run the 5K distance.

In Wisconsin as well as a number of other states, cross-country meets are just four kilometers. During the few occasions she has run 5K, Seidel has done well. She ran a PB of 17:55 this past summer in winning the female division of the Hartland Run to the Peak 5K road race. Seidel has high hopes for Foot Locker.

"Going into this having never run a big national meet, I want to see how I can do," she said. "I'm thinking maybe top 20, maybe top 10. I am going to stay hopeful and just stick to my training and we'll see how it goes."

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