The Pacesetter

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Arbor Day 5K to kick off road race season

Prairie Striders Running Club kicks off its 2025 outdoor racing season with the Arbor Day 5K at the Brookings County Outdoor Adventure Center Friday, April 25.

The free, timed event is co-sponsored by the City of Brookings Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department. The race begins at 6:30 a.m. and follows the trails at Dakota Nature Park. The finish line and post-race refreshments will be inside the adventure center for a better location to socialize in case of inclement weather.

While the event is free, registration is required. Participants can fill out the form in advance by downloading it at prairiestriders.net/arbor-day-5k.html.

Formally known as the Arbor Day 5K, the event honors Brookings' "Friend of Trees" Kathleen "Kay" Cheever, who died Jan. 9, 2002. She was a lifelong advocate for the planting, nurturing and appreciating trees in the Brookings area. Cheever served on the Brookings Arbor Day Committee at its inception and initiated this event.

The city's forestry department provides a free seedling to all participants. Traditionally, the race has been a great attraction for families and also is walker and stroller friendly.

For more information, contact race director Dan Radtke at dradtke@mtrsd.com.

40 and counting

Niva, Lahr haven't missed an LA Marathon yet

By Dave Graves
Newsletter editor

"Do we have a streak or does the streak have us?" That chicken-or-the-egg question is often posed by members of the Los Angeles Marathon Legacy Runners, a group of men and women who have run each and every LA Marathon since the first one was staged in 1986.

Among the 86 runners who kept the streak alive at the 40th running of the LA Marathon on March 16 were Brookings residents and SDSU graduates Gordon Niva and Susan Lahr.

The couple, now ages 74 and 73, respectively, show no sign of planning to finish at 40, however, they also are practical. "We're taking it one year at a time," said Lahr, who has run more than 60 marathons total.

Niva, her husband of 50 years, said, "The streak is like a marathon in itself. For years I liked to joke about running the 50th. Now it's not too far from reality. We'll take them one at a time and see what happens."

Gordon Niva and Susan Lahr pose in 2024 by the point in which Legacy Runners would have completed 1,000 miles on the Los Angeles Marathon course. This year the Brookings couple ran their 40th consecutive LA Marathon.

From casual runner to marathoner

Niva has been running since age 12 when he was in junior high school at Barnard near Frederick in northeast South Dakota. He ran recreationally once or twice a week while studying physics at SDSU in the late 1960s. After his 1973 graduation from SDSU came graduate school in astrophysics at the University of Nebraska and then 30 years in the Army National Guard.

"I had an Army buddy who was going to run a marathon. He twisted my arm and I signed up for the Lincoln Marathon in 1978," Niva said.

Lahr had started running while they were living in Lincoln. The arrangement was that Gordon would wash the dishes in exchange for Susan going on a run. Lahr found she enjoyed not only the freedom from dish pan hands but also the freedom that running brings.

In fact, she enjoyed those "jogs around the block" so much that she decided she would run the last 6.2 miles of the marathon with Niva. That didn't go so well.

Lahr's foot started hurting, but she didn't want to complain. After all, her husband had already run more than 20 miles.

Afterwards, it was discovered Lahr had a stress fracture and was put in a cast. After she got out of the cast, Lahr got a good pair of shoes and went back to running. "It's an efficient way to get exercise," she said. But Lahr wasn't content to just get exercise. In December 1979 she ran the Scottsdale Marathon, her first marathon.

Drawing on Olympic inspiration

Niva admitted the Lincoln Marathon didn't leave him yearning to run more marathons.

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40 and Counting

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"I never have looked forward to running a marathon, but marathons gave me a reason to stay in shape. We did one or two marathons for many years. Now we just do the LA Marathon."

The Los Angeles Marathon was inspired by the 1984 Olympics, which was staged in Los Angeles and made history by incorporating the first women's Olympic marathon.

Niva and Lahr were living in California. Niva was working at Vandenberg Air Force Base near Santa Maria, CA. Motivated by the Olympics, he was enthused to join a running group sponsored by his employer, Rockwell International. "That's what gave us the initial momentum" to run the LA Marathon, Niva said. Lahr said, "Then we did the second one, then the third one."

Streak runners gain recognition

By year five, race organizers were offering recognition to the streakers, which later self-identified as the Legacy Runners.

"There were a couple thousand at the first recognition. We were invited to the LA Coliseum, where the Olympics had been held and where the marathon started and finished at that time. They had names scrolling on the scoreboard," Niva said of the event that was held a week in advance of the 1991 marathon.

Other memorable LA Marathons are the 25th in 2011, when the Legacy Runners were given a 15-minute head start on the rest of the field, including the professional runners. One talented, sub-three-hour Legacy marathoner led the race for the first 16 miles. Lahr said, "It was fun to be out in front. Then in about 30 minutes people are flying past us."

Niva also remembers running a centipede marathon in Year 15. A group of five or six put a large sheet over their themselves with holes cut out for their heads. They covered the entire 26.2 in unison at a 10-minute pace with subs jumping in when an aid station stop was needed.

Gordon Niva and Susan Lahr pose with a star indicating that the Legacy Runners were inducted into the Los Angeles Marathon Hall of Fame in 2024. Legacy Runners have run each and every LA Marathon since the race began in 1986.

Lahr recalls that the marathon director was good friends with boxing legend Mohammad Ali. "He would be on a platform that runners would pass early in the race. "Runners would chant 'Ali. Ali.'"

A distinguishing mark of the LA Marathon is the Students Run LA program in which thousands of middle and high school students who are struggling in school are entered into a running program designed to make them marathon ready. These at-risk youth not only build up stamina but also build confidence, Lahr said.

Niva estimates the Students Run in LA entrants make up 10 to 15% of the field, which totals about 25,000.

Legacy Runners have customized bibs

The Legacy group is well recognized by those who follow the marathon.

Lahr said, "There is so much recognition for Legacy runners. The bibs say Legacy and your first name. Everyone on the course recognizes you. 'Honey, there is a Legacy runner.' You get a lot of encouragement while you're out there."

She recalled a race conversation during the 2025 marathon. The woman told Lahr, "'Last year the Legacy runners pulled me through this. I thought if these Legacy runners can do this, I can do this.' The runner was going through cancer treatment in 2024.

This year it was the former cancer patient who inspired Lahr.

Legacy Runners are allowed to line up in Corral B, the second corral to be released. But it also means waiting an hour in their corral. "We stay at the back. We're among the last people at the starting line. We don't like waiting in line for your corral to be released," Niva said.

With a 2025 run-walk time of 6:08:48 Lahr and Niva feel no need to push toward the front of the line.

'Long day at the office'

Niva said, "We have no attraction to the LA Marathon other than the streak. We've done it so many times. It's like your daily commute. We get used to it. It's two nights in LA, shuttle buses, getting up at 4:30 a.m. and not getting back to the hotel until 3:30 p.m. It's a long day at the office."

Of the 86 active Legacy Runners, 10 are women. Niva and Lahr are the only married couple. At one point, there were four.

The future is hard to predict and tougher to live out. But marathoners are a determined bunch. The oldest Legacy runner is 86. Many strictly walk the race … and at a slow pace at that. The last two finishers took 13 hours.

Lahr and Niva don't make predictions. However, they do have March 15, 2026, blocked off on their calendar.

Running through the ages

My fastest running days are behind me. Hard for me to admit, but true. If you are over 40 and have been running regularly for at least 10 years, the same is likely true for you. While this is simply a physiologic fact of life, a slower pace does not detract from my love for the sport.

In many ways, I appreciate running even more than I did a few decades back, thankful that I can still lace up my shoes and get out the door. Though not always easy, my transition to a masters runner has offered an opportunity to adapt and explore motivation beyond a fast finish time or certain pace on my watch.

Following are a few of the strategies that I have implemented over the years.

Alternative race formats, distances

Relay races provide an ideal combination for me – competition without a focus on specific times. These events offer a unique opportunity to match individual effort with team camaraderie. Options abound from local marathon relays, to Ragnar relays, to epic events such as Hood to Coast.

If you can't put a team together, consider a different terrain. Trail running takes the emphasis off distance and pace, posing a physical challenge amid breathtaking scenery. The focus on time just melts away. As an added bonus, the trails can improve balance and core strength, something we start to lose with age.

Then there's exploring limits beyond the marathon distance. Though not yet part of my routine, ultradistance running favors the masters runner. These longer-format races emphasize endurance over speed, well-suited to the older runner who may be short on pace but long on stamina and mental toughness.

Age grading

Changing up the format and distance may not completely satisfy every curiosity. Although I race less frequently these days, I still like to compare races or workouts to past efforts. Enter age grading. This system shifts the focus from actual speed to relative performances by adjusting times based on age and gender.

For example, a 50-year-old female who finishes a half marathon in 2 hours would have an age-graded time of around 15 minutes faster or 1 hour and 45 minutes. In addition to comparing times across the age spectrum, age grading can also help you set realistic goals and paces for training or for racing at other distances.

Check out the age grading calculator and further explanation at Runner's World.

Training and recovery

I rarely wear a watch these days, guided more by my sense of effort. I think that has helped me avoid some of the overuse injuries that plague aging runners. If I am focused on training for a certain event, I may still check my pace or shoot for a particular time on intervals. But I try to avoid running a set pace every day. Similarly, I am no longer afraid to take a day off, something my 20-year-old self would have balked at.

Around age 30, I added a "rest day" to my weekly training schedule. These rest days typically involve cross training or some light weight training, and it gives my legs an opportunity to recover. I expect a second day of cross-training each week is in my near future. Though I initially felt as though I was losing fitness on rest days, I've come to appreciate the rejuvenating effects that will hopefully keep me active in the sport for at least another decade or two.So here I am, a masters runner. The transition wasn't easy at first. Competition was my focus when I began running around 40 years ago, and I still enjoy testing my limits. But over the years, I have come to appreciate all that running offers beyond the personal bests and a time on my watch.

To be honest, I am just happy to run. Each run, regardless of pace or distance, offers a chance to stay healthy, reflect, problem solve or simply disconnect. If you relate to any of this, I suspect you feel much the same. I would encourage you to explore some of these strategies if not already part of your routine – whatever it takes to keep your running rewarding as the years and the miles add up.

Gotta Run!
Matt Bien

Editor's note: *Dr. Bien is a physician with Avera in Brookings. He has raced every distance from 400 meters to the marathon. His most recent event was with a group of other 50+ year olds, finishing second in the "supermasters" division of the 2024 Hood to Coast Relay.*

2025 RACE SCHEDULE

Arbor Day 5K .....Friday, April 25	Jack 15.....Saturday, Sept. 20
Longest Day 10K..... Saturday, June 28	Hobo Day 5K.....Saturday, Oct. 11
Run4Fun.....July 9, 16, 23 & 30	Scotty Roberts 5K.....Friday, Oct. 17
Beef and Eggs 5K.....Saturday, July 12	Brookings Marathon, Half & Relays ..... Saturday, Oct. 18
Oakwood Lakes Trail Run..... Saturday, July 26	Turkey Day Run..... Thursday, Nov. 27
Predictor Mile ..... Wednesday, July 30	

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LIKE US ON

New life members

Seven Prairie Striders have become life members since the annual mailing in February.

We welcome: Diane Burnison-Smith, Greenwood, Ind.; Trevor Hinderaker, Astoria; Jeff Massmann, Little Falls, Minn.; Ryan McKnight, Brookings; Andrew Moeller, Fairmont, Minn.; Brian Nelson, Sioux Falls; and Daniel Radtke, Brookings.

Prairie Striders now has 145 life members. New life members are welcome by making a single payment of at least $125 with a new or renewed membership.

Taking sage advice to heart

SDSU transfer Ford finds joy in running again

By Dave Graves
Newsletter editor

Meghan Ford received a simple piece advice from her running friend after her sophomore year of college.

His nine words of wisdom: "If you don't like it, do something about it."

It was early June 2023. Ford was in Boulder, Colorado, training with her friend after two unsatisfying, injury-filled seasons at Furman University in Greenville, S.C. The Jamestown, N.D., native had enrolled there in fall 2021 after being a three-time North Dakota state cross country champion and the 2019 Nike Cross Regional champion.

"Furman had a really good running program. When in high school I was looking for a female coach and a smaller school," said Ford, the 2024-25 recipient of the Prairie Striders/Phil LaVallee Memorial Scholarship.

Ford graduated from Jamestown High School in 2021, during COVID's peak year. Most of her recruiting was done by phone. Coming from a high school graduating class of 140, she thought a college with an enrollment of 2,000 would be a good fit. It wasn't.

"I got there and it wasn't what they said it would be. I wasn't enjoying running anymore," said Ford, who entered the transfer portal shortly after hearing her friend's advice.

Pain overshadows success at Furman

A three-time Gatorade Player of the Year in cross country, Ford didn't lack for offers while in high school. Colorado, Oregon, Duke and Wisconsin were among those in the hunt. Ford did lack for wise counsel.

"No one in my family had gone to college and I didn't know anyone who had been recruited by a major program. I thought I wanted to get out of the Midwest," Ford said.

The adage "the grass isn't always greener on the other side" certainly applies to Ford's story. However, there were highlights at Furman: first team all-conference in cross country (2021) and indoor track (2022), indoor marks of 4:57.07 in the mile and 9:50.66 in the 3K, and outdoor marks of 4:31.92 in the 1,500 meters and 17:11.06 in the 5K.

Meghan Ford creates a gap between her challengers at the SDSU Classic Oct. 4, 2024. She was the first-place Jackrabbit and fourth overall with a 6K time of slowly working back again to be ready for the cross country season 21:22.19.

"I did record some fast times," said Ford, who is a graphic design and German studies double major at South Dakota State University.

She was able to run one cross, one indoor and one outdoor season in two full school years. In February 2022 she suffered a stress fracture in her fourth right metatarsal and later that year she suffered a stress fracture in her second left metatarsal. Furman's high mileage program and Ford's stubborn, hard worker mentality didn't help matters.

Pain and lack of camaraderie took the fun out of running. "There weren't a lot of people I felt I could lean on" at Furman other than one athletic trainer.

Transfer time: personal touch the difference

When she entered the transfer portal, Ford found her name still drew attention. She made four college visits, but none of them felt right and many of the emails she received felt like a generic copy-and-paste message. An exception was the one from Alex Muntefering, who had just completed his first year on the Jackrabbit coaching staff.

"Alex put a lot of thought into his email. He took a lot of time to reach out to me and then we talked for quite a while on the phone. I decided to take my last visit at SDSU," Ford said.

SDSU wasn't in her high school recruiting picture. However, she did have a high school classmate, Ben Anteau, who was running at SDSU.

During Ford's SDSU visit, Muntefering laid out the plans he had for her and said "he still believed in me, which was something I hadn't heard in a while, something I hadn't heard at Furman," Ford said.

She enrolled at SDSU in August 2023, but a new school didn't mean a new body.

"I ended up with another two stress fractures last year. It was part of being deep into an overtraining hole at Furman. At SDSU I needed to recalibrate and not just push through," Ford said.

Similar injuries, different reactions

Her SDSU injuries were a right metatarsal stress fracture in August 2023 and a left tibia stress fracture in January 2024. While the pain was altogether too familiar to Ford, the response from teammates and coaches was different.

"As soon as I decided to transfer, it was like a weight lifted off of me." That continued after the injuries arrived. "I just feel very supported, not just by Alex (Muntefering, the assistant coach who works with the women's team) but also Denise (Maas, her athletic trainer).

"The guys and the girls on the team are very close. It's wonderful to experience the camaraderie. Everybody is there to lift you up if you're having a bad day. If you're doing well, they're there to celebrate with you.

> *"The team culture here is truly supportive; we have become a family."*
>
> SDSU runner Kayla Christopherson

"If I was having a bad day in my rehab, (teammate) Kayla Christopherson would take 20 minutes out of her day to pick me up. It is so much different from my old school," Ford said.

Christopherson said, "It was so easy to get to know Meghan. I too was challenged with injuries. Watching how resilient Meghan was and is and her

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determination, she inspired me to put in the work. I could lean on her when days felt tough, and she could lean on me and together we could rely on the team. The team culture here is truly supportive; we have become a family."

Long, slow rehab produces results

SDSU has been a good fit for Ford in other ways as well.

"I've definitely become more of a social butterfly at college. I like having a ton of people on campus. I like that vibe and I like how much everybody here on campus and the whole town is into sports," Ford said.

Her 2023-24 injuries meant Ford spent nearly the entire year in rehab.

"In spring 2024, the athletic trainer put her foot down. She said I had never been injured in high school and I needed to go back to being a heel striker like I was in high school." At Furman, she had been trained to be a forefront striker. Her rehab regiment began with two minutes of slow treadmill running and then two minutes of walking, making sure her form didn't break down. That was from late February to late April. By May she was cleared to do a full run.

"I needed to let my body adjust and not force anything. That really helped me in the fall," said Ford, who PR'ed in the Sept. 6 Augie Twilight with a 5K time of 16:47.9 and then ran a 6K PR of 20:49.9 a the Wisconsin Pre-Nationals Oct. 12. Shortly after she "blew up" her calf in a speed workout and developed tendonitis in her ankle.

She gritted through a seventh-place finish at conference Nov. 2 with a time of 21:05.2. During winter rehab, Ford suffered a small stress fracture, further setting back her return to competition. Until to run until March, the plan is to slowly work back into condition to be ready for the cross country season.

Perseverance produces character

Her outlook on life also is strong.

"I used to be very shy in high school. Since I started college I've become much more confident. I stand up for myself more. I do what I need to make something happen. Transferring was really hard for me to do. Growing that much in two years is something that is pretty crazy for me. I became more independent.

Despite having ankle tendonitis, Meghan Ford gritted out a seventh-place finish at the Summit League Championship in Vermillion Nov 2. Injuries have kept her out of indoor and outdoor track, but Ford plan to ready for this fall's cross country season.

"Being out on my own all the way out in South Carolina was hard. But I don't regret going. It was not right for me, but I don't think I would be the person I am without it. In high school, I never dealt with any hardship. Now I've learned perseverance. A lot of people after two or three stress fractures would have given up and said college running isn't for me. It's been a life lesson in perseverance, with my family or whatever I do for a career."

Ideally, that would be doing graphic design and/or marketing for a running gear brand or an athletic department.

But Ford has a while before needing to send out her resume. Her eligibility runs through the 2027 outdoor season.

As for running after SDSU? "I never see myself not running ... I definitely want to become a marathoner."

Member Spotlight

Name: Selina Hallan
Age: 46
Residence: Brookings, SD
Occupation: Quality assurance/quality control tech at Valero in Aurora
Family: Married 22 years to Scott Hallan, daughter Madilynn, son Jonah, and daughter Shelby.

Years as a Prairie Strider member: 10

Why you're a member: I am a member of the Prairie Striders to be a part of a community of like-minded individuals. We are passionate about running, overall health and well being, and our community. To inspire and promote health and well being to benefit our fellow community members.

What you enjoy about running: October 2011, I quit a nasty pack a day smoking habit. Shortly after quitting smoking, I starting walking my dog Jack; which than turned into a short jog and eventually running.

Favorite running memory: My favorite half marathon, 11-17-19. Las Vegas Rock and Roll Half Marathon. They shut down The Strip and you ran at night plus I got a free Kesha concert. I got up to the third row and my husband got to join me for no extra cost!

Your favorite Prairie Striders race: My first Brookings Half Marathon with my sister Sandra, 5-13-2017.

Favorite workout: Powershop Group Sculpt Class, Wednesdays 5:30 p.m.

Selina Hallan hangs ten and flexes biceps while running the Kona Coffee Half Marathon.

Your running goal: In 2019 a coworker and I discussed doing a half marathon in every state. I have 16 states completed — SD, FL, IA, ND, OH, NV, NC, MN, WI, NE, KS, IL, NM, HI, AR. Bozeman, Montana, is in September.

Avera Sports Science studying young runners

Article and photos courtesy of Avera Health
Editor's note: *Prairie Striders Running Club is a financial contributor to this study*

Have you ever stopped to think about what goes into taking a single step? What about the impact of that step? These are two questions that are at the core of a two-year study being done to better understand performance training and the health impacts on young athletes.

"The title of the study is examining the influence of age, running volume, running mechanics, and then diet on measures of musculoskeletal health and running performance," said Derek Ferley, the Avera Sports Science director.

The study began in 2024 and is made up of participants who are all high school kids ranging in age from 13 to 18. There are testing periods where the athletes are asked to return and go through a battery of tests to complete after the spring track season and the fall cross-country season.

"So we provide a diet log during the season and off season. We do a DEXA scan, which is for our bone density. And then VO2 Max test along with the running analysis," said Ellie Maddox, a Sioux Falls Christian standout and one of the study participants.

Study focuses on bone health

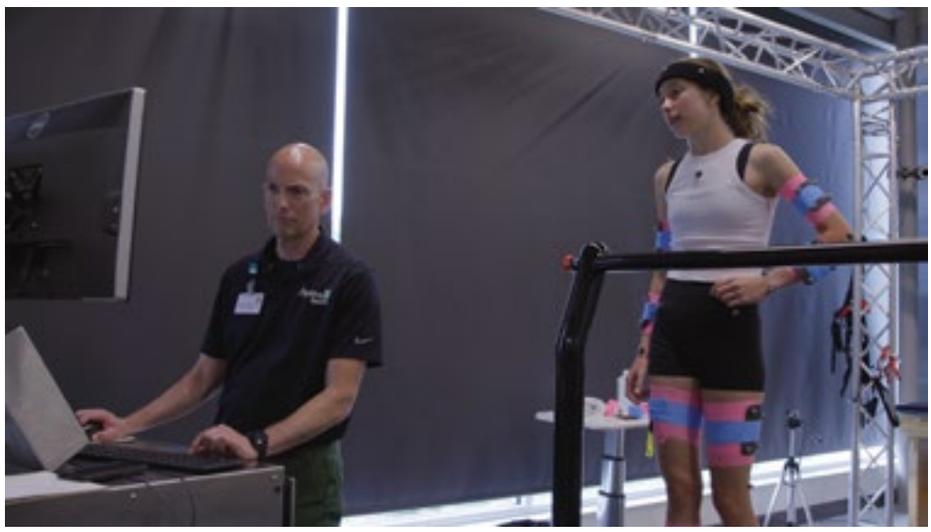
"We really want to see what type of an influence does your age and how much you run impact your bone health, your bone density. If you're not consuming adequate calories or vitamin D or iron, that could all have ramifications for your bone health," said Ferley.

"I'm definitely curious to see and learn more about myself, but also as South Dakota runners as a whole, and just seeing like, I guess just where we're at compared to everyone else," said Maddox.

"Great job. Here we go. Here we go!" said Ferley, shouting encouragement as Ellie pushes herself on the treadmill.

"The VO2 Max is definitely daunting, because you really get pushed to your limit," said Maddox.

As the name implies, it's a maximum effort test consisting of five to seven different stages and each stage lasting about two minutes long. Every time the speed is increased. So towards the end



stage of the test, you're going to be giving it a full-on effort. Calculating effort is one aspect, but there's also an opportunity for more science to be done.

"In between each stage, there's a 30-second pause during which time I get a blood drop and I can measure your blood lactate. That gives me a picture of what's called the lactate threshold, which is a key metric in terms of distance running performance," said Ferley.

The VO2 Max is paired with another performance test of a 3D running analysis. A special treadmill and camera system that can calculate stride, gait and force of each foot strike. Participants are fitted with motion sensors to track their movements and provide quantifiable metrics for the research.

"So we want to see, are there particular measures that jump out or that certain individuals demonstrate that maybe are correlated with particular injuries, say shin splints or knee pain or hip pain?" said Ferley.

Study to be useful for docs

Next is a DEXA scan to get a bone density reading on participants hips and spine. The scans done for this research study are a little different than what typically would be done clinically in this age range. Athletes, when they're training, have specific needs and also have specific injuries that could happen to the skeleton during their training and into their sport season.

"So that really is important for us to understand so that when something goes wrong with that process, we know how to reverse that or fix that or help with that. So I'm very excited to be involved," said Leah Prestbo, a family medicine physician and bone densitometrist.

The more information that is gained from studies like this one, help give physicians and trainers strong recommendations about what will help and what will not help as far as bone development.

"All of this base research really goes into helping build scientific information in general. Eventually it will enrich our clinical ability to help people and this is just amazing," Prestbo said.

Confidence boosted through study

"Yeah, I think it's definitely helped me understand the importance of a diet and also our bone density, all the little different factors that go into running. It's definitely helped me understand the importance of each of them. I really think the VO2 max definitely has helped just even seeing how I've done and becoming a better runner through the different times I've taken it and that I've been able to run further or faster and just those little things that have boosted my confidence in myself," said Maddox.

"We're just combining all these different tests to get a really complete picture on not just the overall, how does the athlete perform on the cross-country course or on the track but also just generally speaking what's their overall health like," said Ferley.

The two-year study will conclude after the 2025 fall cross country season. The data will then be analyzed and, hopefully, provide researchers and trainers with a new perspective on best practices for training and fueling young athletes.