

NIKE ATHLETE FOCUS OF THE WEEK News

Marie Lawrence

Youthrunner-Nike Athlete Focus of the Week

Lost amidst the stories from the recent Footlocker Cross Country meet is the accomplishment of Marie Lawrence. There were so many compelling athletes & their tales just in the girl's portion alone including the defending National Champion Aislinn Ryan's attempt to repeat, Nicole Blood (4-time FL finalist & 3-time Eastern Regional Champion) looking for redemption, Annie St. Geme, California Champion & daughter of Ceci Hopp - the 1980 champion & Jordan Hasay's brilliant championship as a freshman. It was overall a stellar field, which was arguably one of the very best, although it is too early to tell. We need another ten or so years to compare them with say the 1990 field that included Melody Fairchild, Deena Drossin (Kastor), Milena Glusac, Amy Rudolph, Jen Rhines & Rachel Sauder to name just a few, who accomplished so much in college & afterwards.

A great story in her own right was Marie Lawrence of Reno, Nevada, who placed second in the nation for the third straight year. It is a most impressive accomplishment to have such success over a three year period. It is useful to reflect back on the careers of other great Kinney - Footlocker runners. In the long history of the championship only Melody Fairchild of Colorado had a better record in a three year period. In my mind one can make arguments that she is the finest female high school runner ever and from 1988 to 1990 she placed 2nd and then won in succeeding years. The streak leaves her alone in FL annals, yet even Melody did not qualify as a freshman, as Marie has done.

Now one might think in terms of the only other girls to repeat as champions & ask why aren't their records better? Certainly two wins puts them in a lofty position but, of course, the subject is over a three year duration. It's that 3rd year that gives the Nevada star an edge, as Erin Keough placed 5th in her first appearance & Erin Sullivan only qualified twice. When the tri-year period is invoked you have only two records that are relatively equal to Lawrence's & for one of them you must go all the way back to the race's inception to have a really close challenger. Lynn Strauss of Idaho placed 2nd in the first two years the race was held & placed 3rd the next. Amanda White of Maryland is the other leader in the trifecta category as starting in 1990 she placed 3rd, 2nd & then 1st as a senior.

Footlocker has had many great runners through the years yet there is nobody else who owns as great a string of finishes. Cathy Schiro placed 1st in 1984 but was 3rd & 10th the previous two years, while Erin Davis garnered a 1st as a frosh & followed with 4th & 7th place efforts. California great Sara Bei took the laurels in 2000 but did not make the finals her junior year, although she did earn 10th & 7th earlier. Janet Smith of New Jersey is close with a first in 1983 & two fifth place finishes the previous two years. Megan Thompson never won but took 3rd in 1987 & then followed with 6th & 4th. Another non-winner with a stellar record was Sarah Schwald who annexed 4th in 1987 & followed with 5th & 4th. Ohio's Katy Radkewicz placed 7th in 1984 & improved the next two years to take 3rd & then 2nd. Close also is Vickie Cook of California who was 6th in 1979, 3rd in 1980 & 6th in 1981 & then there was Zoe Nelson, who won in 1902 & returned the next two seasons to take 8th both times. Behind them are Milena Glusac (2 - 30 - 7), Carrie Tollefson (9 - 5 -15) & Megan Flowers (15 - 6 - 14 - DNF).

Consider the wealth of talent over the years, who competed in the race, and you have to be impressed. Still with all the stars of the past, who shone brightly at Footlocker, Marie has etched

herself a special niche in the pantheon of greats. Consider that Celeste Susnis, Suzy Favor, Ceci Hopp & Carole Zacac all had stellar careers later but did not manage a three year stretch, while Kira Jorgensen (1 - 4), Nnenna Lynch (12 - 18 - 12), Amber Trotter (7 - 1) plus Deena Drossin (11 - 17 - 13) other others who do not match the Nevada.

It is somewhat fitting that Marie has her string of seconds, as that is in a way how she started her high school career. As a freshman she was regularly seen following her older sister Collier, who was a senior, in the various races around the state. When the two competed in California's Stanford Invitational, Collier won their division with the fastest time of the day, while Marie followed six seconds behind in second place. That pecking order continued in the Nevada State Championship, as Collier won while recording the same time as Marie. There was even a story that Marie was singing to calm her sister at the State meet, which left her unusually tired at the end. The two headed to the West Regional, where they were the only two runners in the early stages of the race to challenge defending champion Zoe Nelson of Montana. That effort clearly effected Collier as she struggled on Poop-Out hill & Marie actually appeared to have held back to encourage & aid her sister: or was that to plead & prod. They both rallied late in the race to take 3rd & 4th and earned a trip to San Diego.

The string of seconds finally was broken & it was a matter of conjecture, what effect it might have on the young Nevada runner. As an aside my wife & I usually have a friendly rivalry & pick the top ten finishers for the Nationals, & that year she boldly predicted that Marie could win. That prediction looked very good after the commencement of the race & Marie appeared to be a new runner. She was certainly not holding back, for after a half mile as she ran up the first hill toward the pool Marie was running at the side of Katelyn Kaltenbach of Colorado & just behind the early leader Jennifer Barringer. Collier was well back already & of note was the fact that defending Footlocker champion Zoe Nelson trailed her. By the time the runners climbed Upas hill for the second time the race was down to just two runners, as Nelson fell off the pace. Lawrence made a surge down the hill to take the lead for a bit, but her first victory of the year did not happen as Kaltenbach out-kicked her at the end.

Since that race Marie has clearly been one of the premier runners in the nation. Her name has been etched at the top at the Nevada State Championship list & she was the Footlocker West Regional title-holder last year. This year she won California Invitationals at Clovis & Mt. SAC & she placed 2nd to the young star Jordan Hasay at Footlocker this year. Now some might feel something was missing from her resume & might feel a bit down about that but that is not the way Ms. Lawrence feels. Prior to the race in San Diego she noted that she'd prefer to win her senior year & clearly was very pleased with this year's race.

Interviewing her at Balboa Park just after the race she commented: "I am so happy. I'm not disappointed at all!" She followed to applaud the winner noting "she totally deserves it. To have a freshman be that good is totally worth it." She quickly recovered from the effort & noted again that she was "happy with the effort." "I felt so good after the race, like I never ever cry but I was crying at the end of the race ... I was just so excited." She takes nothing for granted but with one more year to go "hopefully" anything can happen. And it might just be a first after saving the best for last.

She possesses the speed necessary for track with best times of 2:12 in the 800 meters & 4:47 in the mile. Obviously she possesses endurance & is a competitor, as well, but it is her buoyant personality that may be what makes her so special. Note also that she was 2nd with a time of 17:25 in 2003, 17:39 in 2004 & 17:19 this year, so she's not slowing. It will be more than just interesting to see what happens next year, but she already has accomplished something quite special.

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Footlocker 2004 Story from Sign On San Diego Footlocher 2004

December 10, 2004 Footlocker 2004 There has never been a three-time Foot Locker National cross country champion, and the thought has never entered Marie Lawrence's mind.

Story from Dyestat Running Times Magazine Story Interview from Fastwomen.com