



Only 14, Hadley going the extra miles

There's been concern over young runner's workload

By PETE IORIZZO Staff writer

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Alana Hadley was just 3 years old when she started begging to run with her father. Mark Hadley resisted, then finally relented, figuring his daughter would tire before they'd gone a block. He'd carry her home, then continue his run.

Instead, Alana Hadley ran a mile. By the time she was 6, she'd completed a 5-kilometer race. At 11, she was running 40 miles a week. At 13, she finished 33rd in the women's-only New York Mini 10k.

You might notice Hadley in the Freihofer's Run for Women this coming Saturday in downtown Albany. She'll be that wisp of a 14-year-old at the heels of the elite, professional runners motoring around the course faster than most of us could bike it.

"I like knowing that as I'm doing the race, there will be all these people that I've looked up to," Hadley said. "Now that I'm racing against them, it's a pretty cool feeling."

Hadley's personal record in the 5,000 meters is 17:06, not fast enough to win the Freihofer's, but plenty fast enough to make her a curiosity -- and, sometimes, a mini-controversy -- in not only her hometown of Charlotte, N.C., but in running circles around the country.

Some context: Frank Myers, the longtime Colonie High track coach, loves his younger runners; Hadley would beat most by more than a minute in the 5,000. Hadley's personal record in the 3,000, a time of 10:09, would be the second-best among Section II high school runners this season -- which is remarkable considering Hadley, an eighth-grader, is not yet actually in high school.

Most high school cross-country runners log 40 to 50 miles a week. Hadley runs 70 under the supervision of her father, who also serves as her coach. Because her middle school doesn't have a cross-country team, she runs on her own, competing in about 10 events a year.

Some have questioned Hadley's workload, which is more comparable to that of a seasoned, professional runner than a middle-school student. But Hadley's father, Mark, said his daughter not only handles the heavy mileage but craves it. He tries not to take the criticism personally.

"I try to remember that 99.9 percent of people have their heart in the right place, that they're concerned for the well-being of the kid," said Mark, who, along with his wife, Jennifer, ran on scholarship at Ole Miss.

"They may be drawing the wrong assumption, and I may not like what they're saying. But their intention is good. They just don't know us and all the facts."

Here are some of the facts: In her first 5k, when she was just 6, Hadley finished in 29 minutes -- a pace better than 10 minutes per mile. She finished so quickly, Mark almost missed her at the finish line. At 13, Hadley was running unattached in NCAA meets and finishing in the top five. She has been featured in Runner's World and the New York Daily News.

But even as she runs 10 times a week -- doubling up three days -- Hadley still keeps time for more typical teenage endeavors. She sings in her school choir. She reads Nancy Drew mysteries. And she likes making crafts -- pipe-cleaner animals, necklaces from beads and string -- for her friends.

She's also a straight-A student with dreams of one day becoming an occupational therapist. She wants to help children like her sister Rose, a first-grader with autism.

"Running is a big part of her life," her father said. "But if she decided tomorrow to stop running, she still has a lot going for her."

That's not likely. A few times a year, Hadley's father makes her take a break from running for a week or two. She tries, but after three or four days, she's begging to run with him again.

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Alana Hadley bio

Age: 14

Hometown: Charlotte, N.C.

Personal bests

Distance Time

1,600 5:06 (April 2010)

3,000 10:09 (April 2011)

3,200 10:51 (April 2011)

5,000 17:06 (April 2011)

10k track 36:14 (April 2011)

1/2 marathon 1:21:15 (March '11)

Freihofer's Run for Women

When: 10 a.m. Saturday

Where: Downtown Albany

Info: <http://freihofersrun.com>

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