

Hogan hitting her stride

Runner gains elite status despite brief background

By PETE IORIZZO Staff writer

Published 12:41 a.m., Tuesday, May 31, 2011

A former cross country runner himself, Joe Hogan was watching his 9-year-old daughter, Megan, participate in a fun run near their Ballston Spa home when he remarked to his wife, "I would have died for a stride like hers."

"It was very smooth and efficient," he said.

That was the first hint Megan Hogan was a natural-born runner, even if her potential wasn't realized until almost a decade later.

Because her high school, Saratoga Central Catholic, lacked a cross country program, Hogan didn't begin running in any organized way until her sophomore year of college.

That wasn't too late for her to become a two-time All-American at George Washington, where she still is considered the best cross country runner in school history.

This Saturday she plans to compete in her first Freihofer's Run for Women -- not as one of the thousands of everyday runners, but in the field of elite professionals, a field full of women for whom running has been a lifelong pursuit.

"It's just crazy to think about," said the 23-year-old Hogan, who this past March began running professionally for Team USA Minnesota.

"Four years ago I wasn't even running. I was a basketball player. I never in my wildest dreams would have imagined I was going to be a professional runner."

Running a competitive race near her hometown for the first time, Hogan is one of two Capital Region natives in the professional field. The other is former Saratoga Springs High runner Nicole Blood.

But whereas Blood was a record-setting runner throughout her high school career, Hogan played basketball and soccer.

Not until her sophomore year at Mount Ida College in Newton, Mass., did Hogan begin running. She joined the cross country team as a way to stay in shape for basketball.

She knew nothing about running. The night before her first race, she played a pickup basketball

game. She didn't know what kind of sneakers to race with, so she borrowed a friend's sprinter spikes and ran with those.

She won anyway.

And then she won the next two races, too.

"I couldn't even believe it," she said.

For reasons unrelated to sports, Hogan decided to transfer to George Washington. She gave her cross country times to George Washington coach Brian Beil and asked to join the team.

Her times were just average by the more competitive Division I standards at George Washington, but Beil agreed.

"I figured there was no harm in trying," Beil said. "But there wasn't any point that I envisioned her going to nationals."

That is, until Beil began to watch her compete.

In her first race, Hogan was running in the middle of the pack as the trail rose to the top of a hill. At the peak, with most runners fatiguing, Hogan quickened her stride and passed at least 25 competitors on her way to a fourth-place finish.

Meanwhile, in practice, George Washington's coaches started Hogan on a training program, her first. She was running as many as 80 miles a week. She began to learn strategy, too -- how to run in traffic, when to break away from the pack, how to tackle hills, etc.

With formal training for the first time coupled with her natural ability, she began to fulfill the sort of potential her father had first spotted 10 years earlier.

She was a two-time Atlantic 10 cross country champion, and this past fall, only four years after she started running, she finished eighth at the NCAA Championships.

"It'll likely never happen again," Beil said. "I've never heard of that."

Hogan's future likely includes more professional races and marathons against some of the world's best runners. Her coach thinks she will fare well, even at the sport's highest level. After all, she's barely gotten started.

Reach Pete Iorizzo at 454-5425 or piorizzo@timesunion.com.

Megan Hogan bio

Age: 23

Hometown: Ballston Spa

High School: Saratoga Central Catholic

College: George Washington

Achievements: Two-time Atlantic 10 cross country champion ... Sixth at the 2010 USA Outdoor Championships in the 10,000 meters ... Eighth at the 2010 NCAA Cross Country Championships ... Third at the 2011 USA 15k Championships.

Freihofer's Run for Women

When: 10 a.m. Saturday

Where: Downtown Albany

Info: <http://freihofersrun.com>

70% off on Gear & Apparel

Get the gear you need
theclymb.com

1 Tip For Weight Loss

See The lbs Fall Off By Changing 3 Things You Eat
thedietsolutionprogram.com

Jesus the World's Savior

Who was Jesus? Why did he come to earth and die? How does he save us?
www.orlandobible.org/dawn

Ads by Yahoo!