

## Washington super soph heads to state

Written by Sher Jasperse

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Shannon Gorman is nervous. Mention Saturday's state cross country meet, where she will be the lone representative from the Washington girls team, and she grimaces with tension.

"I feel sorry for people who have to deal with me the day before a meet," she says. "I just don't talk to anyone."

Her coach, Lisa Nicol, is unconcerned.

"Outwardly, she doesn't seem confident," says Nicol, flashing a knowing smile as she describes the sophomore leader on her young team. "But as soon as the gun goes off, it all goes away and the competitor comes out. You can see the look on her face. She knows where to be on the course and what to do, and that's something that's difficult to coach."

Gorman, who lives in Springville, was the only girl on her middle school cross country team. "I ran with the boys," she says. "I don't think I could ever walk normally because my legs were always dead. But I think it helped me."

In ninth grade, she enrolled at Wash – not because of running, she says, but to learn Japanese. Or more Japanese, after she spent half of her eighth-grade year living with relatives in Japan.

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"My mom is Japanese, and a big part of my family is Japanese," she explains. "I could never talk to my grandparents, so I went to Japan to start learning the language." She's already taking AP Japanese at Wash.

But the running also mattered. After dominating her competition at middle school meets, she wanted to try Class 4A, she says. "I would rather run faster times but not place as well than place higher with slower times."

Her times have improved with the competition, but she has hardly fallen off the leaderboard. After running at state her freshman year as part of a deep Wash team that finished 11th, she has notched impressive finishes throughout her sophomore season, claiming 10th place at the power-packed Mississippi Valley Conference Super Meet and fourth at last week's regional qualifier.

Gorman has been drawn to cross country and track since she ran a timed mile in grade school, she says. "I just can't stop running. I really want to be fast." And there are benefits, she adds. "I can eat a lot, and I'm not coordinated enough to do anything else."

That's a questionable statement from an athlete who is part of Wash's running/swimming super-sophomore duo of Gorman and Jackie Hughes. The two athletes have participated in both cross country and swimming this fall, improbably juggling practice and meet times during the overlapping seasons.

While Gorman has paced the cross country team, Hughes has emerged as Wash's top swimmer and one of the best in the conference. Although conflicting schedules prevented the girls from competing at every meet as the season progressed, they were varsity-caliber on both teams based on their early-season performances.

Characteristically, Gorman downplays her efforts in the pool. "I'm not good at distances," she says. "I just like all the people on our swim team. It's fun."

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Nicol says she and swim coach Megan Lewis have encouraged Gorman and Hughes in their dual pursuits.

“Look at what they have both achieved,” she points out. “It was great cross-training. They were both getting great cardio workouts and giving their legs a rest.

“Both girls were so organized about where they needed to be and communicating with me and Coach Lewis. Megan and I joked that we were never concerned if one of the girls wasn’t at practice, because we knew they were at their other practice.

“But all four of us knew that at the end of the season Jackie was going to swim and Shannon was going to run, and that needed to be their focus. It worked out nicely. Coach Lewis and I got to coach them both and we each got to keep one.”

Their roads will diverge this Saturday as Hughes competes in the regional swim meet while Gorman heads to the state cross country meet in Fort Dodge, hoping to break her personal best of 15:14 and possibly surpass the Wash sophomore record of 15:10.

“I’d like to place better than last year, when I finished 43rd, but Kennedy and Linn-Mar have gotten so much better,” she says of the two Metro teams that qualified for state.

Her coach expects Gorman to break the sophomore record and wouldn’t be shocked if she runs under 15 minutes. With two years to go, she says, her sophomore sensation will no doubt eclipse the school record of 14:44 during her Warrior career.

“She will be the best distance runner we’ve ever had come out of here,” Nicol states unequivocally. “She also ran the 1,500 very well in track last year. She will leave quite a legacy behind her at Wash when she graduates.”

Gorman seems less certain of her speed than her durability. “I’m the stereotypical Asian,” she

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laughs. “I’m short and I don’t get injured.” She also runs with a zen-like intensity that belies her age.

Gorman says she was “really sad” that her team missed qualifying for state by a mere five points. But with four sophomores on the varsity, Nicol has high expectations for a group she describes as “very young, very dedicated and extremely hard-working.

“The Metro area has become quite a battle, and the good thing is that they are all friends and they are all pushing each other. It’s going to be fun to see where the Metro goes in the next few years because of that, and the MVC – oh my gosh – nearly half the teams at state are MVC teams.”