

Local kids are in it for the fun

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Kiana had a day off, with the high jump on Thursday and the long jump Saturday.

Temperature also was an issue for the cross country kids.

“I went to Philadelphia and New Jersey and qualified there,” Alyssa explains, saying it was cold and the course was bumpy. “And hills — lots of hills.”

But it wasn’t hard, she says.

“The hills, some of those hills” were hard, Noah says, but the next step, in Hunterdon County, N.J., was harder. Philadelphia (Belmont Plateau in Fairmount Park.), Noah says, had “one big hill, but that was all.”

Alyssa had an adventure going to Philadelphia.

“My dad couldn’t find the way,” she says.

Both Alyssa and Noah say their trip to nationals was long, despite being much closer than the track and field meet the Sechlers had to drive to.

“It was long because we got stuck in traffic for four hours. We got to sleep, but then we had to wake up (to run),” Alyssa says. “I’m grumpy in the morning. Very grumpy.”

Noah says he had a chance to meet new friends while he was there.

“We started talking, and they were talking about where you live and stuff like that,” he says. One boy he talked to was from Alaska.

The younger kids don’t look upon running as exercise or a health kick — they both just have fun doing it. They follow the same process as a serious competition runner, but that’s just part of what makes it fun, they say. For example, Alyssa doesn’t think of the two bowls of spaghetti she ate before the race as carb loading.

“It’s called coach mom kicking in,” Carly says.

“Right before I run I eat half a Pop-Tart,” says Noah, who prefers cinnamon (Alyssa likes blueberry).

After the race there was time for some relaxation. Alyssa went to the beach to

collect sea shells, while Noah opted to torture his granddad.

After running a PR in the national meet, Noah says, “We go to places I would like to go.” They went to Mag-iQuest, sort of a real-life Dungeons and Dragons, where Sprecher had to endure two and a half hours of Noah’s celebration.

“We had to go to Landry’s steak house after that,” Sprecher says. “I hate steak.”

Noah says he’ll probably coach like his granddad, too. He even knows what to tell them: “Exactly what he tells me.”

“I will be a coach and I’ll tell kids on my team what my mother says to me,” Alyssa adds.

The Sechler kids also look up to their coaches. Malik says it’s no different learning from them as from a coach they don’t have to go home with at night.

“My dad taught me what my arms are supposed to do whenever I run, and my starts. My mom taught me my run-through on the jumps,” he explains.

“They taught me about long jumping, how I’m supposed to be positioned, and my mom taught me how I’m supposed to arch and how to do the run,” Kiana agrees.

All of the kids are involved in other sports; Kiana runs as well as jumps but didn’t make it to the national meet in a running event. She did add a coach to her family tree for that part of the sport.

“Whenever I was little (Malik) used to help me with my runs,” she says. “I started last year. My parents and family were all doing it and it seemed like fun. And it was fun.”

Malik says he prefers the sprints to the jumping events.

“I just like them more,” he says. “I play football and basketball (and baseball). It helps me to stay in shape.”

Youth doesn’t excuse the contants from practice and warmups. The young athletes work out three days a week to prepare for meets, and have to do the same active stretching as their elder counterparts to



Photos submitted by MEREDITH SHEPHERD

Above — Noah Shepherd, 8, approaches the chute in a U.S. Track and Field Association cross country meet.

Left — Noah Shepherd, left, and Alyssa Lynch pose with medals they received for their performance in USATF cross country. Both ran the 2K and ran their best times in the national championship.

stay limber.

“We do certain sprint drills and stuff. For high jump I do my J-turns and kips. For long jump I practice piking and runs,” Kiana explains. “J-turn is how you run to the bar. The kip is the part where you go over the bar.”

“At the end of practice we do active stretching. It’s high knees and A-skip and a B-

skip,” Malik adds. And, he says, “I try not to eat that much at all before I go to the competition.”

None of these four went into this expecting to win anything. They did it for fun, and that they had. There are others in the program, but these are the kids who worked through the more difficult competition.

“I started thinking, let’s see what happens because it could only get harder from there,” Malik says. “I would do it again because it was a lot of fun out there.”

When Sprecher first told Alyssa about the national meet, she said, “I want to go! I want to go!”

“I thought I would be going,” she says.