



Athlete of the Week: Nick Ahlheim

Jake Fitzpatrick and Lincoln Shorley, Sports Editors
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Silently gliding into the recordbooks, this week's Athlete of the Week is senior Nick Ahlheim. Ahlheim, a member of the Cross Country since his freshman year, has been a pivotal part of St. Louis U. High's success this year.

After one of the best track seasons in recent SLUH history where Ahlheim split a 1:57 800m and a 4:20 1600m, Ahlheim got the chance to be the pacer for the 800 meter Elite high school boys Festival of Mile race. Despite his success, Ahlheim was ready to wreck the same havoc in the fall. And wreck havoc he has. Two weeks ago, Ahlheim catapulted himself into record books with one of the fastest times in SLUH history at the legendary Lavern Gibson course with a blazing fast PB of 15:31. It didn't end there though. Just five days later, at conference, Ahlheim captured the individual victory. Ahlheim is SLUH's 9th straight individual victor, with one of the fastest times at MCC ever, 16:01. Whether he's in Chinese class or tearing it up on the course, Nick Ahlheim continues to be a force to be reckoned with.

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Ahlheim pacing himself on the course | Dave Ebenhoh

Jake Fitzpatrick: Let's flash back to the very beginning: what was your biggest reason for wanting to join SLUH cross country? Was running in your blood or is it something that you had to work for?

Nick Ahlheim: It's really weird because none of my family members are runners or anything. Going into freshman year, I didn't know if I would make the soccer team, which I played all growing up. I wasn't very good, and I didn't like it particularly. And my mom told me, "Mr. Porter (who she knew from my sister doing dance with Coach Porter's daughter) is the cross country coach, you should try it out!" And then I tried it out freshman year and I guess you could say the rest is history.

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Lincoln Shorley: Building off that, if you had to sum up or choose two of your favorite races from your last four years, what would they be and why? How do those two races sum up your experiences running for SLUH?

NA: This is kind of a crazy pull, but I would say Fox during Freshmen year. That was my first win ever and was really the first race where I actually believed in myself. That was the race where I told myself, 'Hey, I can do some crazy stuff.' It was freshman year, but that race gave me so much confidence. My second would probably be Nike Twilight a few years ago. I was not expecting at all to PR by 20 seconds, and I've never been great on that course specifically, but I think that was a breakthrough for me. It showed that I can compete with a lot of the fastest runners in the region. That I can be bold.

JF: Switching to MCC itself, what was going through your mind as you toed the line of that race? How about mid race?

NA: I knew right off the bat that I had a really good shot at winning conference. I had a lot of confidence and I just rode off of that. I just had to want it enough, stay calm, stay focused. When I stepped on the line, honestly I just did what Coach Porter always says... smile. That day I genuinely just felt happy to be there. I guess my strategy going into the race, to be honest, was to get to the very front no matter how fast it went out. I didn't care, I was gonna be up front. Specifically during the second loop, I really made my move and surged. And from there I just held on. There wasn't really anything complex to the race plan, I just had confidence and did what I know I can do.

LS: Kind of a general assumption when people think about Cross Country is that all you do is run and that's it's a really individual sport. What would you say to those people and people who are even thinking about doing Cross Country? How have you seen the team aspect show both as a captain and someone who's made many of your friends through the team?



NA: I mean, I'm not gonna lie, we run a lot of miles. But you really do make some of your best friends through this team. Going into SLUH, I was really quiet and timid and nervous about talking to people, but Cross Country really helped me open up. It was a place where I made so many of my friends while stretching after practice or just going to get food with friends. You're gonna run with your friends for an hour straight, so you are bound to make some of your best friends through all of that. And other than that, you and your teammates are doing one of the hardest possible things that you can put your body through each day, so doing that with each other is something that builds relationships for sure. Whether it's racing or hammering the last mile repeat in a workout, you guys are gonna be together and bond.

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JF: There's so much noise leading up to the postseason, both about what the team and you can do, so what is the most important thing for you to just keep your head down and stay focused?

NA: What I want to try to do is to just stay focused on myself and what I need to do, not looking at what other people on the team are doing and not focusing on what other teams are doing as well. People will ask me what my thoughts are going into state, whether that's the team or not, and I basically just tell them the same thing: we're excited, we're ready, we think we'll do really good, but we'll see what happens. As long as I don't spend a bunch of time thinking or worrying about it, I think I'll do okay. This is one of the best teams in SLUH history, and we all know that. Coach Porter has been saying it, but we just have to go in with a certain level of confidence.

LS: Whether it's what you eat or what you do, what is your pre-race ritual?

NA: For pre-race stuff that I do, one thing I've started doing is, taking a spoonful of honey because your stomach will burn through that really quickly and then that's easy energy, and it's just not as heavy as regular food, and I won't feel sick before my race which has been a little problem in the past. A lot of times when I'm driving, I'll listen to music, kinda hype myself up a little bit and just get ready. I wouldn't say there's one thing that defines what I listen to, though. And then when I'm warming up, I just can't really be upset or worry too much about what's going to happen during the race. I just need to kind of be there for my teammates, be in the moment with them.





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