

Freshman Cross Country Runner Elena Rybak Is Byron, Carlson, Petri and Kalp, LLC, Father McGivney Catholic High Female Athlete Of Month

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GLEN CARBON - Freshman cross country runner Elena Rybak has introduced herself to the local scene in a big way, as the Father McGivney Catholic High School runner has twice broken the school's recorded for the fastest times in the school's history, most recently at the Freeburg Invitational Sept. 25, winning the race with a record time of 17:20.4, breaking the old mark by a whopping 36 seconds.

It's been her efforts that have made the Griffins one of the state's contenders in Class 1A, with more big events coming in October, leading to the state series later in October and into November as well.

For her outstanding efforts on the cross country courses so far this season, Rybak had been named the Byron, Carlson, Petri, and Kalp Father McGivney Catholic High School Female Athlete of the Month.

Rybak, who runs for head coach Jim Helton, has stood out in some of the most important meets in the state so far, including a big effort at a meet at Detweiler Park in Peoria, on the exact same course that is used for the IHSA state meets in early November.

"I placed second in the First To The Finish Invitational at Detweiler Park in Peoria," Rybak said. "I set a new school record and (personal record) of 17:56."

Rybak thanked her family, coaches and teammates in both junior high and high school for their help and encouragement, along with a personal trainer that she works with.

"My parents got me started with running, and are always supportive," Rybak said. "My coaches and teammates in junior high made me enjoy running. My CrossFit coaches and workout partner helped me get stronger both mentally and physically. Also, my current coaches and teammates are always pushing me and helping me become a better all-around runner."

Rybak started running in grade school, and enjoys the team aspects of cross country, along with the encouragement she gives and receives from her teammates.

"I have been running since fourth grade," Rybak said. "My favorite thing about cross country is being part of a team where we are always trying to help each other get better every day."

Being involved in sports itself has helped Rybak develop her character, in both athletics and in real life as well.

"Sports has taught me how to stay disciplined and persistent," Rybak said, "not just in training, but also in school and everyday life."

Rybak also has played club soccer since a young age and thinks soccer helps her with running.

"I have been playing club soccer since second grade," Rybak said, "and I plan on playing school soccer in the spring and running track. Soccer and running have always been my two main sports, and I truly believe that soccer has made me a better runner, and running has made me a better soccer player."

Rybak is a central defender and central midfielder in soccer, and also runs the 400, 800, and 1,600 meters in track, and hopes to do both for the Griffins. She does hope to run in college in the future, but isn't sure where she'll go to school as of yet, and hopes to major in the medical field. As far as the remainder of the cross country season, Rybak has a very simple, yet ambitious goal for herself and her team.

"My main goal this season is to do everything I can to help my team become the first girls cross country team at Father McGivney to run at the state meet," Rybak said.

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