

# Running with a purpose

## Cherokee's Lyles gets help, finds success on track

Although she is a long distance runner, Malia Lyles has learned she isn't running alone.

The senior cross country and 3,200-meter specialist for Cherokee High School might be running by herself on the course or track, but she isn't when she takes off her training sneakers and cleats.

Lyles is alone when she runs because, not only is it the nature of her sport, but also because she is so good, she is usually so far in front of the pack. In cross country this fall, she finished third in the South Jersey Group 4 sectionals. This spring, she has the second fastest time in the 3,200 with a time of 11

minutes, 28.4 seconds behind Triton's Katie Van Horn's 11:22.3.

The solitude of long distance running also allows her to escape from the things that happen when she is not running.

"When I'm training, I feel the need to give it all that I have," Lyles said Sunday night. "There is nothing else that is good that I can put all my focus into."

Lyles has good reason to run so much. In January, Lyles, her mother and 8-year-old sister were evicted from their Marlton townhome. Their belongings were confiscated.

"My mom came to school and said I wasn't allowed back home and that it was important for me to find a place to stay," Lyles said.

Unfortunately, Lyles was already used to finding a place apart from her mom and sister.

"It has been like this for a while, I used to live with my grandparents for my first 12 years before my grandmother passed away," Lyles said.



Kevin Callahan

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This time, Lyles quickly found a place at the home of teammate Krystal Soo. This is where Lyles realized she wasn't running alone in life.

"I don't know where I would be if I couldn't live with Krystal this long of a time," Lyles said. "I know I might not be going to Cherokee."

That would've been the real tragedy, if Lyles would've had to leave school and go with her mother and sister, who are staying with her uncle an hour away. Housing and belongings can be replaced, but a senior season for which you trained so hard for can never be re-

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turned.

Plus, Lyles and Soo have developed a friendship that time or space can never separate.

"She is so much funnier than I thought she would be," said Soo, who will attend St. Joseph's University in the fall.

Lyles has been shown kindness by more than her teammate.

"My parents have been great," Soo said about her father, Douglas, and mother, Mary.

Thankfully, though, Lyles is getting used to being around great people. Her cross country coach Chris Tarello, who also is the middle distance coach on the Chiefs' track team, introduced

her to just how much an outsider can care and help.

"He means a lot to me," Lyles said. "These last four years, we've developed a great relationship. He puts so much of himself into the sport, I don't know how many other schools have a coach like him."

Hopefully a lot do. Schools need more coaches like Tarello, because they help turn out kids like Lyles.

Tarello, a history teacher at Cherokee, has been helping Lyles in so many ways — such as driving her to take her SATs, taking her on college visits and even buying her running shoes.

"She was a very proud kid and she never let it show," Tarello

said about her struggles away from running. "But I knew deep down inside she needed help. It wasn't a matter of neglect on her mother's part. She was working two jobs and trying to make ends meet.

"I grew up in Medford and went to Shawnee and teach at Cherokee, so I really never met a person who had it as tough as she did. That is why I got into teaching and coaching to make a difference in a person's life."

Tarello has done just that as Lyles will attend Monmouth University, where she plans to major in psychology and run both cross country and track.

"I think she could be one of their better runners next year,"

Cherokee track coach Ray Bodine said. "I definitely think her best running is ahead of her."

Perhaps, however, the best people she will ever meet will already be behind her.

"I was coached by Steve Shaklee at Shawnee, who now coaches at Cherokee and he never gave up on me," Tarello said. "From that moment on, I knew I wanted to be a teacher and make an impact on a person's life."

Actually, with Lyles' determination, running and friends away from running, she has already proven she has everything she needs.

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