



**CORINNA PENA, KENNA LONERGAN, SAMARA MILLER, TASHÉE HARGRAVE, GRACE MERRITT
NVHS BOOSTER CLUB FEATURED ATHLETES OF THE WEEK
GIRL'S TRACK & FIELD PROGRAM**

The NVHS Athletic Booster Club is proud to present the featured athlete of this week, Corinna Pena, Kenna Lonergan, Samara Miller, Tashée Hargrave, Grace Merritt. Coach Parejko explains that this year the "theme" for their program focuses on what it means to be a member of a team. This successful team has just won the DVC indoor conference and the coach feels that this victory is the result of the collective effort of several athletes who represent very well all areas of track and field. Therefore, she thought it would be only fair to nominate this talented group of 5 to be featured athletes representing Girls Track and Field!

Booster Club Reporter: *How did you end up in Track and Field?*

Kenna: It's in my blood (- laughs -). My parents, grandpa, uncle, and siblings all did track also.

Tashée: My mom ran track in high school but she had to quit so that she could work and help provide for her family. I wanted to fulfill her dream of running track in college.

Corinna: I started in 6th grade and I also do cross country.

Samara: As a child I always ran rather than walked from point to point. My uncle, who was a track phenomenon in high school and college, repeatedly stressed how successful I'd be in track. It wasn't until his death that I had a feeling in the pit of my stomach that wouldn't go away. Somehow I knew it was a nudge towards track. So I spoke with my ballet instructor who in turn, declared I had to choose. Given how much track would've meant to my uncle I decided to give it a try and I walked away from a promising career in dance.

Grace: My gym teacher freshman year, David Ricca, really encouraged me to join the team. It took me a year to take him up on his offer, but it finally seemed like the right fit. I really wanted to try something new, and track and field offered me both a competitive sport, as well as a personal challenge.

Booster Club Reporter: *I am sure the life of an athlete is not easy. Can you share a time when you had to work through a setback and how did you grow because of it?*

Tashée: Last year, I overheard a couple of girls, who were, at the time, my friends, saying that I wasn't good at running and I didn't deserve to go to Indoor State that weekend. This really hit me hard and broke my heart. I'm not much of a crier when it comes to track, but this was the first time I cried at track practice. I went home and cried more to my mom and of course, she comforted me for a while. After comforting me, she gave me the most amazing confidence talk anyone could ever receive. Before every race, I repeat what my mom said in my head a couple of times so that I can stay confident and determined and not give up on myself. Coach P also gave me a little talk about how I have to stay strong when things

like this happen, because it'll happen throughout life. I've learned that not everyone wants to see you succeed and not everyone who smiles in your face is your friend.

Corinna: Two days before sectionals in Cross Country, our #1 runner, Caitlin Horn fell and broke her arm and could not run. Being in the hardest sectionals in the state, our team lost almost all hope at making it to state. At the time, I was Neuqua's #2 runner and I felt all the pressure on me, even though it wasn't there. I was stressed beyond belief and did not stop thinking about sectionals for two days straight. Luckily, our coach was able to put some hope into us by doing some math and figuring out that we could still make it. The day of the race my coach told us that no one except for him and us believed that we could make it, which angered us, so we ended up running our best and making it to state. As stressful as it was, I learned that you can never lose hope.

Samara: Track and Ballet have completely different characteristics of flexibility. I've been fighting injuries from my head to my heel since my Freshman year, my times would often decline, there's been a constant battle to regain times and I found myself more injured than not. There were many instances where all of it was so overwhelming and disheartening. However, I didn't turn from my new passion behind the icing, medications, stretching, rolling-out, soaking, loss of sleep, therapy, medical tests, doctors visits and fighting through the pain to then give up. Even with personal loss, of a grandmother and great-grandmother I pushed through. It gets difficult, but I always remind myself of why I started running, thus keeping me motivated and successful.

Grace: During the summer going into my junior year, right after finishing my very first season with the track team, I began to have shoulder problems because, at the time, I was playing both basketball and throwing on the track and field team, and the combination of the two really took a toll on my shoulder. I dealt with my shoulder injury for a year and a half using any treatment possible and nothing seemed to work, so I received surgery to repair a slap lesion tear to my labrum in my right shoulder, my throwing shoulder. The recovery was slow, and unbearable at times. I always felt like I could do more than my physical therapist would tell me. I would test my limits in physical therapy, but as much as I wanted the surgery to fix everything the road to recovery was very long. From my injury I have learned to be a stronger athlete, not only physically, but also mentally. I now know when I can push through pain from when something will leave a more lasting hurt. I learned to listen to my body when it hurts. This was hard for me because I always want to put one hundred and ten percent into what I am doing, but sometimes the best thing to do, is nothing. I did not learn this lesson on my own however. It took my coaches help dragging me to the training room, and not letting me throw to start to listen to what my shoulder wanted. All the coaches on the girl's team, not just the throwing coach, supported my recovery and made it easier for me to ease back into the sport.

Booster Club Reporter: *What roles have the coaches played in your lives? What have you learned from them that will serve you well in adult life?*

Kenna: I have learned that being healthy comes first. Whether it's related to injuries or being sick, you want to be at your full potential so you can perform the best. Even when I don't want to, my coaches tell me to take it easy or go home and get some rest because they are looking out for me. They know that I will benefit more from that, than from trying to practice when I'm in bad shape because it could end up hurting me more than before.

Tashée: My coaches have taught me to always push myself, no matter what. There will be times during practice and even during a race when you say that you cannot continue or that you can't do it anymore. You just have to believe in yourself and tell yourself that you're strong enough to finish.

Corinna: The most important thing I learned from my coaches is to never give up hope. There have been times where it seems like everything is crashing down and it feels like it will be impossible to succeed. However, in these moments, my coaches would tell me that the only way that it would become impossible is if we lost hope as a team. In the end, we were able to keep hope as a team and succeed.

Samara: Both my club track and high school coaches have taught me the importance of teamwork. Track maybe an individual sport, but encouraging each other, whether that be with our words or on the track, goes a long way. My coaches have also taught me to go after what I want and to leave it all on the track; at

the end of a meet, as long as I know I gave it my all, that's what matters.

Grace: My coaches have always preached the importance of not only being a good athlete, but also a good teammate. As much as track is an individual sport, all the individuals compete with the same school name across their chests. On bad days it was easy to find other things to be proud of, from the freshman that just set a new personal record, to the person coming back from what was thought to be a season ending injury. The coaching staff of the girl's track team has instilled in me that cheering each other on is an easy way to receive better results. The more a teammate feels supported, the better they will do. I am extremely grateful to them for teaching me how to compete in an individual sport, as a holistic teammate.

Booster Club Reporter: *Samara, what is your recipe for keeping up with your grades?*

Samara: Maintaining a good rapport with teachers, counselors and administrators, keeping an open dialogue, diligence, never falling behind and advance notice of any scheduling conflicts are a recipe for success. Meeting with teachers before school if additional help is needed in a subject, helps ensure practice after school, doesn't adversely affect your grades. It's also important to start your homework as soon as you get home; the longer you wait after a hard practice, the more difficult it is to keep yourself motivated.

Booster Club Reporter: *Tashée, What does winning mean to you?*

Tashée: To me, winning is not about the glory and it's not about the medals and trophies and plaques that you get; it's about the hard work that you put in over the weeks of your training paying off in that moment and at that instant. A winner doesn't have to have medals around their neck. A winner just has to put forth 110% towards whatever they're doing. The outcome doesn't really matter to me. It would be nice to be rewarded for hard work and dedication; however, awards don't define you.

Booster Club Reporter: *Kenna and Grace, how do you deal with losing?*

Kenna: Obviously I'm not happy if I do poorly. But, this doesn't discourage me from coming back and trying again. I don't get nervous from pressure. Sometimes I can tell my body is shaking, but I don't normally get nervous. I usually sing to take my mind off things. My biggest fear in track is not making it to state after already having made it the past 3 years in a row. All I can do is prepare myself and work hard because there's no point in worrying. Worrying and being nervous doesn't change anything.

Grace: Because track and field is such an individualized sport, and there is always something better, you will always be second to someone, no matter how good you are. With that in mind, losing only occurs when you don't give your best effort. If you put in all the work in the weight room, and worked on technique, and you still fall short, at least you know you did everything in your power to do your best. As much as I would like to say that the pressure to win does not ever get to me, just like any other athlete, it does happen. For me, it is controlling when those moments come over me. If I begin to feel pressure to win right before I have to throw I do not perform well. I constantly have to remind myself that I am doing this sport for me, not for a trophy. My fears all have to do with failure. I do not like feeling like I could have done something more at the end of a meet, or that if I would have done this, that would have been better. I have a fear of regret. In order to deal with this, I set a routine, and I stick to it. In order to keep down the fear of failure and regret, you have to do the same things on the good and bad days. It will keep your mind calm even when your heart is racing.

Booster Club Reporter: *Corinna, what would be your advice to a freshman starting in competitive sports?*

Corinna: One of my biggest regrets my freshman year was that I thought that I could become a great runner simply from trying my hardest at practice. I learned that that is only one part of the equation. I started eating healthier and it has made me a much better athlete. I wish that I had started eating healthier last year to see where it would have taken me this year.

Booster Club Reporter: *In quick words, girls, who are your role models and why?*

Kenna: My role model is my sister. I've always looked up to her because of her work ethic and how well she manages her time. She's already accomplished so much, but she continues to work towards her goals and never gives up.

Tashée: My role model would definitely have to be my mom. My mom has made a countless amount of sacrifices for me, which I couldn't be any more thankful for. For example, my mom used to work 12 hour shifts because she's an ER nurse. She would immediately get off of work and make her way towards my track or gymnastics meets. She would go days without sleep, but she didn't care because she really wanted to support the child she loves a lot.

Corinna: One of the most important role models in my life is one of my best friends, Keara Ginell. She works extremely hard every single day without fail at practice and is always trying to become the best person that she can be. She is the strongest, most determined person I know and I strive to be like her.

Samara: My biggest role model without a doubt is my older brother. We're three years apart in age and four in school, but he is my everything. Since I was little, he always had my back. Since I didn't experience high school the same time as he did, I really got to see him evolve into the man he is today. He's such a wonderful person; very intelligent and fun-loving. He encourages those around him to do right, stay motivated, and driven. He's a responsible and trustworthy individual who never fails to put a smile on your face. My brother is my best friend and my hero, I love him so much. He deserves to be put on a pedestal.

Grace: My biggest role model is Anthony Rizzo. He is the first baseman for the Chicago Cubs, and an all-around good person. He works everyday not just to become better, but as a team leader, works to help everyone else achieve. His amazing achievements don't just stay on the field though. He is a large advocate in the fight against childhood cancer, after having it himself. He is undyingly hardworking, a competitive opponent, and an amazing teammate. He is everything I hope to be when I am older.