

Maine East's Kayla Gregorio gets two thumbs-up for attitude, effort



Maine East sophomore Kayla Gregorio won the 400-meter run at the Central Suburban North meet on May 4 in Des Plaines. (Maine East / HANDOUT)

By **Heather Rule**
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Kayla Gregorio is "without question" one of the most talented girls on the Maine East girls track and field team, according to Blue Demons coach Scott Schultes.

But Gregorio, a sophomore, is much more than just a fast runner. She also brings an infectious positive attitude. When Schultes asks her how she's doing or what's going on, her response is usually the same — a smile and two thumbs-up.

"It's her signature thing that kind of has rubbed off on some of the other girls on the team," Schultes said. "And it's rubbed off on me, too. I find myself doing it because it's just this infectious, positive thing."

Gregorio, a second-year varsity track team member from Niles who also runs cross country, runs the 400- and 800-meter events.

Already this season, she's dropped at least a second off her 400 time and she went from 2:30 to 2:25 in the 800. The time drops are "considerable," Schultes said.

Her positive attitude came in handy during a meet at New Trier on April 29. Gregorio was slated to run the 400 against some strong competition. She checked in for her race — the fourth heat, lane two — early on. Due to miscommunication, Gregorio ended up missing the race. After she checked in, the number of heats were condensed, Schultes said.

He said it would have been hard for him to contain the disappointment on his face if he was in Gregorio's place, but she was very composed, he said. Gregorio said she was sad, but she knew there would be more races to make it up. She shrugged it off and ran a nice leg on the 4x400 relay team afterward, according to Schultes.

At the Central Suburban North meet at Maine West on May 4, she won the 400 with a personal-best 59.12, just under the state-qualifying time of 59.28. At the start of the season, it was her goal to beat the state mark.

"Exciting," she said. "I didn't expect to break it that day, so it was pretty cool."

Now, she just needs to do the same at the Class 3A Loyola Sectional meet Thursday in order to secure her spot at the state meet. She will also earn a berth with a first- or second-place finish at the section. It'll take the same work she's done all season, doing every track workout and making sure she's pushing herself to do her best, she said.

Gregorio finished fourth in the 400 last year at the Niles West Sectional, crossing the finish line in 1:00.94. The state-qualifying time was 59.29.

Gregorio said she doesn't consider herself a leader but is encouraging with teammates. She tries to be positive because it's hard to do a workout if you're not, she said.

"You don't do well if you're just negative all the time," Gregorio said. "And then it brings your entire team down if you're negative."

Schultes said Gregorio is "a young lady of few words" but has a strong work ethic, hardly ever misses a practice and just runs her best. These attributes also help raise the level of the other girls on the team, Schultes said.

"I think all the girls on the team get excited when they see Kayla run because she's really good and she gets after it," Schultes said.

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