

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES



the true story of MARIA THOMMES

Leading the Pack. Maria Thommes is all smiles as she runs ahead of a pack of boys at the Prep Invitational at Elmwood Park. Photo by Maggie Rossiter

Liz Berigan

“And that is when the car hit me.” As Maria Thommes runs the last half mile she recites the words that Mr. Wright has drilled into her head: “Don’t let your mind know what your feet are doing.”

Maria remembers that after this hill is the finish line. She thinks to herself, “Make it up the top of this hill and you are done forever.” Thommes crosses the finish line with a smile on her face.

She is happy with how she did, but she didn’t get first. Thommes doesn’t even know her place, but she finished, and to her that is all that matters.

Flashback to 14 years prior. Thommes is in the Intensive Care Unit at St. Joe’s hospital. Her helpless, 3-year-old body is connected to a respirator, a brain monitor, a feeding tube and a catheter. Her left lung is deflated; her left leg, pelvis and collarbone are broken. As Thommes’s parents sit by her bedside, they pray that she will come out of her unconscious state.

It is the day of the accident. The smell of freshly-cut grass lingers in the air as Mr. William Thommes and two of Maria’s brothers, Mark and Craig, finish mowing the lawn in Keystone.

“My dad, my two brothers and I were at Keystone and we were playing a game called ‘in-and-out of the car doors,’ and I was trying

to get back into the car. The door was locked, so I ran around to the other side. And that is when the car hit me.”

In the recovery months, Thommes had to relearn how to move and control the left side of her body. It took months of physical and occupational therapy for Thommes to learn how to walk again. All the while, Thommes’s doctors put six pins in the side of her left leg to help it heal, from which she still has scars.

Now, Thommes is in her fourth year of cross country, and despite her former injuries, she never walks during a practice or a meet. However, Thommes doesn’t exactly know where her drive to keep running comes from. She just runs.

“I just don’t walk. I think that if you are going to walk then you should just not do cross country. Why would I walk now if I didn’t before?”

Before her freshman year at Marian, Thommes was looking through her sister’s yearbook and saw the cross country spread.

“This is going to sound really lame, but I saw someone with a cross country sweatshirt and I thought, ‘Hey, I can do that!’”



Perseverance. Maria races to the finish alongside classmate Shelby Stefanski. Photo by Maggie Rossiter

Thommes said she is extremely happy with her decision to run cross country. She is not only getting exercise, but she is socializing with her different teammates.

“I think cross country is good because there are about a hundred girls that do it, you talk to everyone and get to meet new people. Everyone is so nice and encouraging.”

Thommes doesn’t let the fact that she is not a fast runner keep her from trying her hardest. “In meets I don’t think about much, I just try to catch the person in front of me.”

Although Thommes doesn’t see herself as an inspiration to the team, her teammate, senior Kelly O’Brien, disagrees.

“Maria is such an inspiration to our cross country team. To be able to get through an incident as traumatic as hers is a feat in itself, but then to compete in a sport that is so physically demanding for four straight years is truly inspiring. She is very dedicated to the sport, and I really admire her for not giving up.”

Coach Roger Wright said, “I think Maria is a perfect example of not counting yourself out before you even try. Maria tries so hard in practice and in meets and always improves her times, which is really rewarding for a coach. Maria has been such a joy to work with the past four years.”

During a race, or even in practice, Maria will be there to cheer on her teammates. Her constant positive attitude infects her peers and makes them want to do better. “I don’t think I’m an inspiration. Running is not hard, you just run. It’s just your mind that tells you no.”

in a MOTHER’S EYES

Journal courtesy of Mrs. LuAnn Thommes. Each entry was written by Mrs. Thommes in her daughter Maria’s perspective about the accident and the days that followed.



Monday Sept 2, 1996 7:00 p.m.
Daddy, Mark, & Craig are mowing the lawn at Keystone. Mom brought Ellen, Erika, & I to the pool to swim. Mark & Craig joined us for a while, and then while Daddy finished trimming the lawn, Mom took Mark, Craig, & us 3 girls to mow Jan's lawn. I was playing a game of in & out of car doors with Ellen & Erika, while Mark & Craig mowed. Daddy had joined us & was getting ready to fertilize Jan's lawn. I couldn't get into the car doors so I ran around the trailer to get into the

car doors on the other side. I took too big a turn around the trailer and got hit by a car. I was knocked unconscious and had a broken left leg, pelvis, and collar bone. My left lung was deflated, and I had numerous scrapes up my right leg, shoulder and right side of face. The ambulance came & I was taken to the hospital by life-flight helicopter. I was on a respirator, brain monitor, IV's, feeding tube, & a catheter. They considered me in critical condition and in the intensive care unit at St. Joe Hospital. Many friends & family visited &

started praying for me. Mom & Dad stayed with me all night. Aunt Patty took Brian, Stephanie, Mark, Craig, Ellen, & Erika home so they could get some sleep. Tom (uncle) drove to Tellus and picked up Grandma & Grandpa Thommes. I played Barney with me. I've started running but I'm still a little choppy running. When I go outside with the kids to play in the snow, I wear my helmet. I have to wear my helmet when I'm outside playing for a year. I have even helped Mom shovel snow.

SPORTS PERSEVERANCE instead of paychecks

High school athletes turn sports into a rigorous occupation

Anna Woods

Some high school students are working rigorous jobs but aren't getting paid a dime.

Their occupation is athletics. Student-athletes spend the majority of their days in school or sleeping, which doesn't leave much extra time for other things necessary for teenage growth.

Athletes also have obligations to practices, games and homework, not to mention finding a couple minutes to relax and chow down on munchies.

Marian has a strong reputation in athletics. We hold numerous state titles and runner-up trophies, but what many people fail to realize is the price that athletes pay to devote their time to sports.

According to experts at the Stanford research facility, the average teenager is now only getting six and a half hours of sleep; this number only drops for student-athletes.

Junior Rachel Lukowski is one of the many Marian girls who somehow does it all. Lukowski is a member of the cross country and track teams. She also holds a job at Sgt. Pepper's, a small Italian restaurant in Millard.

"It affects my social life when I work weekend nights. During the week it kind of does because it's time that I could be using for homework, but I am working instead. It's getting easier now that we are further into the year."

Lukowski has learned time management skills from being a working athlete, but she has to give up part of her weekends to do so.

A recent poll revealed that roughly 60 percent of Marian students are involved in at least one sport. Among these athletes, only about 35 percent have jobs. This isn't a matter of these athletes being too lazy to get a job; they simply don't have time.

All Marian girls know the feeling of a 45-minute class taking a century. Now imagine that it's the last class. When everyone else is running to her car after school, these athletes are running to the gym.

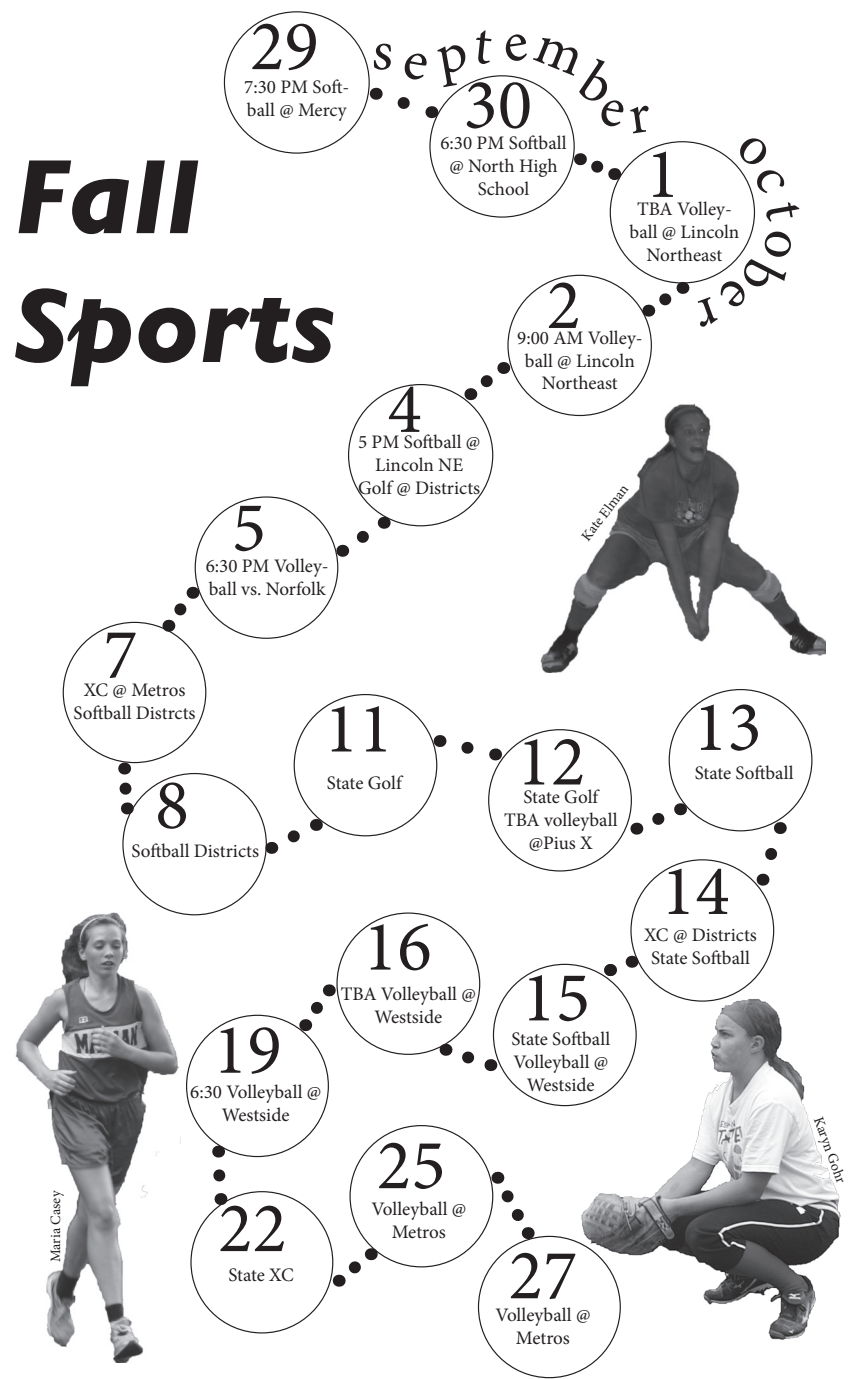
Athletes devote countless hours to "the love of the game," making sports their occupation.

Every student here has something she loves, whether it's sports, dance, music or something else. Girls devote countless hours to the things that they love, and enjoy it.

Whether it's giving up sports to have a job, not having a job because of sports or donating spare change to Walk-a-thon, everyone has made sacrifices, and everyone must live with those. The trick is, finding the joy in them.

Athletes devote their time to sports, singers wake up early for practice and artists spend countless hours perfecting their work, but they all love what they do. That's all anyone can ask.

Fall Sports



SMALL TEAM, BIG HEART

Softball team overcomes small numbers

Brittany Hytrek

It is the junior varsity game versus Papillion LaVista South High School. The bleachers are splattered with many a vigilant parent and quite a few siblings, but not much of the student body. Minimal noise passes around.

A few varsity teammates show up early and relax in the stands before their pre-game warm-up begins. They laugh as they give each other back massages. They expand their circle as more teammates join the group, but the stands are still not full.

Students may remember hearing a rumor that the softball team was exceptionally small this year.

This thought becomes nothing more than a faint memory as the junior varsity pitcher, junior Biz Steinauer, takes the mound. All sorts of indistinguishable cheers erupt from the sparsely filled dugout. "You got it, Biz! Be ready! Let's go Biz! Biz, Biz, Biz!"

In fact, the softball team did have some difficulty with numbers this year.

"This kind of problem is not unheard of," varsity softball head coach Al Leaders said. "An average softball team (including both varsity and junior varsity) is in the 25-plus range. This year we had 25 girls try out, no [girl was] cut, and three girls quit."



Rain, Rain Go Away. The varsity softball team busts a move in sophomore lot in an attempt to bring the rain and postpone practice for the day. Photo by Molly Misek

Some years, including this year, the team has had to recruit players outside of tryouts to fill spots the week of tryouts. Leaders said that he asks the girls if anyone has played softball before and wants to play high school ball to improve their skills. The girls then ask their friends and classmates that they know have played softball if they want to continue to play. This has always been a successful

method for them.

There are both pros and cons of having a smaller team.

"It makes us more susceptible to injury.." Leaders said. "We don't have as many players that could cover a position if someone got hurt. However, we don't have the competition that bigger teams have when fighting for spots."

Of the girls that tried out for varsity this year, there was only one designated pitcher and one designated catcher. Leaders's solution?

"We bring girls down to junior varsity to work on pitching or catching so we can make them better for future years."

"We have great junior varsity coaches that help the girls improve." Leaders said, "They [the girls] are always better at the end of the season after they have worked with the junior varsity coaches."

The team members don't seem to mind their smaller team. Junior Hannah Raabe said that her favorite part of the small team atmosphere is, "We get along really well. We're a well-bonded team."

"We hang out together. We feel each other's pain. Karyn [Gohr] and I are suffering buddies," Steinauer said.

"I like how we get more individual work, more time working on individual goals," senior Maddy Coble said.

The team's goal for the year? They want to make a STATEment by making it to State softball this year.

The team doesn't let their size hold them back. With their present 7-7 standing and quite a few games to come, the team still has a ways to go before the season is over. With metros complete, districts starting on Oct. 7 and state softball starting on Oct. 13, there is still time to see the softball team in action.

Check the calendar of sports events above on this page. Grab a jacket and loads of school spirit and make your way down to the softball team's next game. This small team will not disappoint with their big heart full of softball spirit.