

Catching Up With ... Kristi Rieger

Kristi Rieger's love for running started at an early age. As time has passed, she has taken that love to a higher level, now serving as a Meet Director for some of the most prestigious cross country and track and field meets in the country.

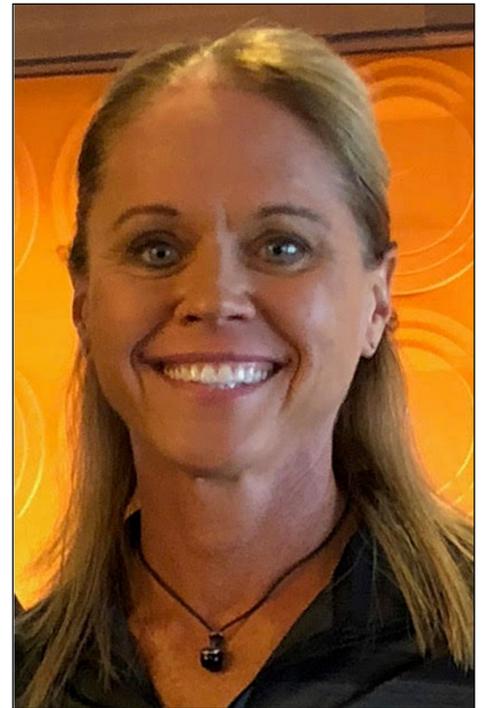
Originally from Huron, she got her first taste of running in the first grade. In an attempt to burn off some of her limitless energy, Kristi's parents entered her in a Huron Parks and Recreation summer track program. That energy served her well, as she won the 1600 in 6:45. This was the start of a what would end up being a successful career at SF Washington High School and Augusta-

na College.

Running for the Warriors

Kristi's family moved to Sioux Falls while she was in elementary school. A 1987 graduate of Washington, she won a state cross country title on the Lakeview Golf Course in Mitchell. Although thrilled with the win, she was disappointed that her Warrior team finished runner-up. She had equal success on the track winning the 1600, anchoring the winning medley and 1600 squads and anchored the 2nd place 4x8. All as a freshman.

She especially recalls the 1984 Howard Wood Dakota Relays where she ran 5 events. If you are thinking



that you can only run four events in high school, you are right. The weekend went something like this: she anchored the 4x800 relay squad to a win in a 10:03.89 clocking in the first year of the event; she won the 1600, anchored the winning medley relay; finished third in the Special 800 and finally anchored the winning 1600 relay. Shortly after that event, several coaches filed protests as that was her 5th event of the meet. Her coach did not think the special 800 counted towards her total. Needless to say, they were DQ'd. Still an impressive weekend. She is a member of the WHS Hall of Fame.

Washington's Rieger reigns No. 1
Brockmueller, Koistinen top of their classes

By TONY MANGAN
Argus Leader Staff

MITCHELL — Kristi Rieger's blue eyes were full of bewilderment. The Axtell Park Junior High School ninth grader, running for Washington, had just won the South Dakota high school girls state Class AA cross country championship Saturday at Lakeview golf course, and the reality of her performance had yet to sink in.

As people gathered around her to offer their congratulations, Rieger seemed taken aback by all of the attention surrounding her.

"I thought people would think I couldn't win because I was a freshman," she said. "It was a goal way out there. If I didn't win this year, I knew I had three more chances, and not many people have that."

Rieger didn't hesitate as she won the 3,000-meter race in 11 minutes, 9 seconds. "I ran the kinda race I wanted," she said. "I knew I had to

Washington coach Vance Butler said: "Anytime in athletics, anything can happen. The girls ran hard. Moments just tightened up, and she feels pretty bad."

"But she is an outstanding runner. She doesn't have anything to feel bad about. She will be back, and she will be back strong."

man Academy basked in the limelight once again. Koistinen, a junior, won her second consecutive Class A meet, winning in 11:05. Despite being the favorite, she was surprised by her triumph.

"I didn't think I could win. I have a hip injury, and I have only been running the last five meets."

Spearfish also won the team title.

Rieger
"AA" champion

Koistinen
"A" champion

Brockmueller
"B" champion

State high school cross country

On to Augustana

After high school, Rieger stayed in Sioux Falls to run for Augustana where she made an immediate impact for the Vikings. She qualified four times for the NCAA DII national meet in the 800, earning two All-American honors. She left Augie with the school record effort, 2:11 in the 800-meter run. She graduated from Augustana 1992 with a BA in education. She later earned a Masters degree from USF in 2002. Augie would later honor her with the Ole Odney Award, which is given annually to an alum who had success in the coaching ranks.

From Athlete to Coach

Her first teaching job landed her in Watertown where she was an assistant track coach under legends Vic Godfrey and Marv Sherill. 1995 brought her back to Sioux Falls. After one year of middle school coaching, she landed the head cross country job at Roosevelt high school. In 1998 she took over the boys and girls track and field job, a position she held until she left coaching in 2008. She continued to teach until 2016.



Her Roosevelt squads had great success, finishing as runners-up nine times in cross country and track field. Highlights include coaching the first Rider state cross country champ (Tyler Wetering); coaching three consecutive Roy Griak individual champions (Krista and Allison Eckert); winning a Griak team title; coaching teams that were selected to the

first two Nike Cross-National Cross-Country Championships in Portland, OR. Her 2004 and 2005 girls' cross-country squads were both ranked in the top 20 in the nation. In addition, Allison Eckert was a three-time Footlocker finalist and two of her relay squads finished in the top three in the nation at the Nike Indoor Nationals in 2007. Wetering's effort at the

state meet during his senior year was one of the most impressive performances during Rieger's coaching career. The Rider senior won the 800, 1600, 3200 and anchored the winning medley relay. Rieger is a member of the RHS Hall of Fame as a coach.

Nike Comes Calling

Rieger began a relationship with Nike in 2004 taking a team to the inaugural Nike Cross Nationals (NXN) – a national team championship event. In the first three years of the meet's existence, a committee selected the top 20 teams that would be invited to Portland. In 2007 Nike began qualifying teams in a regional format. As her girls' teams were selected in 2004 and 2005, she was familiar with the meet and its officials. When Nike sought out locations for the eight regions they would use, she got Sioux Falls on the list to be considered for the 'Heartland' Regional. Minneapolis was also considered but the meet landed in Sioux Falls. The first meet drew around 600 athletes. Presently, the meet has ballooned to almost 4,000 athletes and is the largest of Nike's eight regional meets. Athletes come from North

Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. The meet is held in early November after schools have completed their regular seasons. The 2022 event will be held November 13 at Yankton Trails Park in Sioux Falls.

Expanding to the NSAF

In 2016 Rieger began working full-time for the NSAF – National Scholastic Athletics Foundation. The organization was founded in 1990 with a goal of opening doors to the world for youth through athletics and providing them opportunities to succeed and showcase their talents. The NSAF owns and operates the Nike Indoor Nationals, Nike Outdoor Nationals, the Great American XC Festival, Nike XC Town Twilight, the American JavFest and numerous camps and clinics throughout the year.

In 2020 Kristi was named Meet Director for all NSAF's events. "It's still hard for me to believe that I am the meet director for the high school national track and field championships at Hayward Field in Eugene, OR arguably the greatest track

and field facility in the world," said Rieger. An interesting note, over 60% of the athletes who come through NSAF events and programs go onto make an Olympic track and field team. NSAF also takes elite teams on international trips in an effort to prepare them for international competition. She has accompanied teams to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Germany, Peru, Finland, and Iceland.

Not Done Running

Rieger's competitive running did not end in college. She has run 14 marathons and numerous half-marathons. She competed in the Boston Marathon in 2010.

In 2022 she and Marc Madison, her assistant at Roosevelt and the Nike Heartland, started Gold Medal Timing – a full service meet management and timing company.



*Nike Heartland Regional
Cross Country Meet
Nov. 13
Yankton Trails Park
Sioux Falls, SD*