

10-Year-Old Dips Below 19 minutes for 5K and collects women's titles along the way

Molly Tucker, 10, set a personal-best at the Run To Joe's 5K on March 24 in Fort Worth by finishing in 18:43.2 and also won the women's overall title.

She had just set her PR at the Dash Down Greenville 5K the week before by clocking a 19:29 in the Dallas run. She has her sites set on higher goals (think Olympics), and with her rate of progress, who knows?

Molly ran her first 5K on Jan. 13 at the Bold In The Cold in Grapevine and won the women's overall title in 20 minutes and 21 seconds. So, how does one top that for an encore? Well, how about adding another women's overall title and then going on to win two more in March and April.

Molly won the Jogging For Johnson 5K on Feb. 10 with a 20:10, 11 seconds faster than her Grapevine effort. Then she won the Run To Joe's 5K on March 24 in Fort Worth when she smashed her previous PR by running an 18:43.2. On April 14, she added the Secret Service 5K women's title to her collection with a 19:30 on a blustery, cold morning. Even though she didn't win, she did post another sub-19-minute effort when she ran an 18:45 at the Big D 5K in Dallas on April 1.

So, where did this young speedster come from? Her dad, John, said Molly started running in a summer track program sponsored by the City of Southlake Park and Recreation Department just last May when she was nine. Talk about a fast learner!

She competed in TAAF meets in June and July, but was unable to compete in the qualifying tournament because of family commitments. However, her most recent times in the 800 and 1,600 meters before the qualifying meets would have placed her in the top three, John said. She also was winning her age-group at every race she entered.



Molly after winning her first 5K overall women's title at the Bold In The Cold.

John Tucker submitted the photo he acquired from LGRAW.

How did she become so fast? John said he had no idea that she had this kind of speed. In the 800 and 1,600 races, John said Molly's style was to maintain a constant speed rather than waiting to sprint at the finish. He believes that placed her competitors at a disadvantage because she always would build a big lead. He said one young national male 800 competitor revised his running method to match hers. He was one of the few to beat her by mounting a late sprint to the finish.

He said Molly would run in the 400, 800, 1,600 and a relay leg on the same day at the meets and would come home with a fistful of blue ribbons.

It's not as if Molly just jumped off the couch one day and became fast, though. John said she had been playing soccer, and those games can last an hour or more. Because of the constant running and only a five-minute break during games, she was building her stamina and sprint speed. Consider that it takes her a little over 20 minutes to run a 5K, then the 3.1-mile distance is almost a snap.

She plays in the Grapevine-Southlake Soccer Association and attends Durham Intermediate School. She runs in the Eubanks Intermediate running club once a week.

There's plenty of family support, too, as her older sister, Julie, takes her to the track once a week and her brother, Matthew, attends all her summer meets. He helped her with her running style and confidence.

And it appears a fast running gene might run in the family as her younger sister, 9-year-old Caleigh, ran her first mile at the Jogging For Johnson and won the women's division. John said Caleigh is involved more in soccer, but might run in a summer track program.

John said he is pleased with all the adults who are encouraging Molly and shaking her hand after the races. She did encounter a couple of people trying to block her way in the Greenville run, but she has been advised to push on. And her three brothers who compete in karate (one has a black belt) attest that Molly can dish it out when necessary. So, maybe someone will think twice before trying to block her way again.