

Leana Sloan, Jaime Nunez win Pumpkin Dash titles, but another big winner is the third-place female

By Fiona Green



Chandler
Crumblish

Leana Sloan of Grapevine added another overall female title to her résumé in the Valley Ranch Pumpkin Dash 5K on Saturday, Nov. 20, in Irving.

Leana completed the course in 20:48, only 40 seconds behind the overall male winner, 16-year-old Jaime Nunez of Irving. Unlike Sloan, who races almost every weekend, Nunez ran his first non-school race. While he said it was fun to run without pressure in a low-key event, he was quick to point out that this was not his best time for the distance as he has run some sub-19-minute 5Ks and has his sights set on breaking 18 minutes. Nunez specializes in the mile and holds a PR of 4:40. He hopes to break the 4:30 barrier soon.



Leana Sloan

One of the most inspiring runners of the day, however, was 16-year-old Chandler Crumblish.



Jaime Nunez

Watching her warm up, she looked like any healthy, energetic teenager. Standing at the start line wearing her Shelton School singlet, she looked focused and ready. It therefore came as something of a surprise to learn that she was recovering from two broken ribs, suffered as the result of an unprovoked attack in May.

Chandler took a strong lead in the race but her pace slowed a little halfway through as the lingering pain hampered her stride. Yet, she didn't think for a moment of quitting and ran strong to finish third female overall in just over 21 minutes. She hasn't raced much since the attack, giving her body time to heal although doctors have told her that she will probably feel pain for the rest of her life.

For Chandler, however, the benefits of running far outweigh the pain. She chooses to run because running is a huge part of her identity. Chandler is not your average 16-year-old. She is tough, a real survivor whose story began almost nine years ago when she contracted West Nile disease when living in Orlando, Fla. At the time, little was known about the disease and her's was one of the first few documented cases in the US.

Doctors did not expect her to survive. However, Chandler, despite suffering brain damage, was one of the lucky ones who defied the odds. She is articulate, smart and charming and it is hard to imagine she has to cope with issues such as dyslexia and short time memory loss as she seems to take everything in her stride.

Much of her success might be attributed to the Shelton School, where the primary emphasis, according to its website, is "providing learning-different children (average or above intelligence) with full, effective curriculum through individualized, structured multisensory programs." Chandler's philosophy on life is another major factor. When talking about the attack in May, she said she was grateful it hadn't happened two days earlier because it would have prevented her from competing in the State Championships. She also manages to find a positive side to her situation -- it has forced her to concentrate more on her form than she did before. She explained that running is like a drug for her as it instantly elevates her mood and helps her focus. She currently trains with the Metroplex Striders under Terry Jessup and greatly enjoys training with the group who help motivate her. Prior to the incident, her goal was to break 5 minutes for the mile. Instead of feeling sorry for herself, she now imagines what it would take to compete in the Olympics. While she knows it would be a long hard road, it is nothing compared to the journey she already has made.
