

[Ruth White's running legacy extends far beyond northern Maine](#)

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By Sam Canfield

Standing at just 4-foot-8, Ruth White cemented her legacy as one of Maine's most successful amateur athletes earlier this month, finishing sixth at the Foot Locker [Cross Country Nationals](#) in San Diego.

Her performance was the final addition to a list of superlatives that never seemed to end: three-time Maine state champion, three-time Festival of Champs winner, three-time New England champion, and the only Maine schoolgirl to ever break the 17-minute threshold for a 5K — a feat she achieved twice.

“I don't know how you could say she's not the best we've ever had,” Maine distance running legend and longtime Brewer coach Glendon Rand said. “There are runners that are fast and win races, and then there are runners that win in a way that is inspiring.”

What makes White so special is not her packed trophy case or list of course records. It's her universal appeal as a humble leader and relentless warrior that distinguishes her as one of the greatest Maine athletes of all time.

“It's the manner in which she does it,” Waynflete's head cross country coach Steve Withers said. “Everybody's always talking about her — the awe and appreciation of watching Ruth run. She makes kids want to run cross country.”

Identifiable by her short stature, determined yet easygoing look and wiry blonde braids flying in the wind, White has won every New England-based cross country meet she has run in. Stakes high or low, White always comes in first, but it's not because she wants to beat everybody else.

For Ruth, running is about always doing her best, and helping everyone else do their best as well. After races, you can find her cheering everyone on across the finish line, and in interviews she rarely talks about herself.

“There are a lot of really good runners in the state right now, like [Houlton junior] Teanne Ewings and [York senior] Cary Drake. They've been able to push me, and hopefully I've been able to push them as well,” White said. “The community's really supportive. It's fun to be a part of it.”

“She’s always been a consummate teammate, and been willing to go hard,” Ruth’s father and Orono head cross country coach Lin White added. “Her commitment to others is pretty incredible, and we’ve all benefited from it.”

Led by Ruth and [her older sister Nora](#) (Class of 2021), the Orono girls cross country team has won every Class C state championship since the pandemic, and developed a healthy rivalry with Houlton that has helped push Maine distance running forward.

Up in Houlton, the Shires have been led by Teagan (Class of 2020) and Teanne Ewings, and have consistently placed right beside the White sisters. Teanne’s personal 5K record is 17:15.5 and Ruth’s is 16:57.0, both of which were set at the 2023 Festival of Champs in Belfast, and were course records.

“We’re going through our dynasties, and at the center of that are those two,” Houlton head coach Chris Rines said. “Teanne and Ruth are elevating the state — people have started looking at Maine a lot more seriously.”

White is the only Mainer, male or female, to ever repeat as New England champion.

At the Foot Locker Nationals these past two years — and as a three-time Maine Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year — White has proudly represented Maine on the national stage, and will continue to do so at [Boise State](#) next year.

This October, White committed to run Track and Cross Country for the Broncos, joining a small handful of Mainers to ever run at a Division I program outside of New England. The transition to Division I distance running can be extremely challenging, but Ruth’s undying passion and fearlessness has brought her success at every stage in her career.

“It started when she was 3 years old, doing the Turkey Trots in Brewer,” Lin White said. “Her approach to racing has never changed.”