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Headlight



Written by the students of Marblehead High School for our school and community

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Beyond the starting line: How Marri O’Connell prepares for every race

Anna Cruikshank, Assistant Editor, Sophomore

Marri O’Connell is the captain of the girl’s cross country team, which is predicted to do immensely well this year under her and Coach Herlihy’s supervision. She is nearly always first in races and has set multiple course records. Read this interview to find out more about how she leads the team and prepares for the mental and physical sport that is running.

What’s going through your mind at the starting line of a race?

“On the starting line before a race I repeat mantras to myself to reinforce positive thinking. It helps center myself and calm me down. It also helps me believe in myself and remain strong when I feel all of the pressure; believing in yourself is key to a good race.”

Do you have a pre-race ritual or superstition?

“I have some superstitions before races. For example, the morning I wake up on a race day, I say to myself, "Today is going to be a great day." One day, Coach Heenan was giving an inspirational talk to the boys’ team and he said, "When you wake up, decide if it is going to be a good day or a great day... make it a great day." That has stuck with me ever since. You have to make the conscious choice to have a great day, and having a great day reflects in your race. Additionally, my pre-race routine is to run exactly one mile and then do dynamic stretching.”

How do you balance school, running, and your personal life?

“Now that running has become a bigger part of my life, it has conflicted with school more. A lot of nights I have to stay up too late to complete my school work; it's a principle of the cross country team that school comes first. This usually works out and I am able to get everything done. In a lot of ways my personal life has been linked to running, which I love. Team bonding via team dinners and meets is always fun!”

What’s one lesson running has taught you that applies to life outside of sports?

“Running has taught me that your mind is your most powerful muscle. In some races I let my mind get the best of me and control the outcome. When I believe in myself, I am able to push to my limits that day—it is the most rewarding feeling. This applies to everything. If you think you are going to fail, your brain communicates this to your body, and the race is 100x harder. I apply this in school a lot, I try to convince myself I can do hard things; this empowers me to study and yields better results.”

How do you push through the hardest part of a race?

“In races when I am in the “pain cave,” or someone overtakes me, I repeat mantras and remind myself of all the hard work I have put in prior to this race. I also tell myself that the pain is only temporary, and I think about how good it feels to finish when you know you tried your best. All the pain and long training is worth it when the whole team is cheering for me.”

Marri’s advice to all runners is to tell yourself you can and to remember the brain is the most important muscle when running; mindset is everything. She also plans to run in college. Marri continues to guide the girls’ cross country team to greatness and, hopefully, to a win at states!



The 2025-2026 Girls' Cross Country Team

Phones in schools: Useful or a distraction?

Evan Eisen, Assistant Editor, Junior

Recently, many states have been putting a ban on cell phones being used in schools. In Massachusetts, state lawmakers have been debating and trying to pass a law that would ban cell phones in schools. Some schools are using a new pouch tool called YONDR, which has stations installed in many schools. The pouches will lock after a phone is put in and won’t unlock until a student takes it to an unlocking station at the end of the school day. Even in Marblehead’s school district, schools are making students put their phones away.

Many feel that not having cell phones in schools will allow students to focus more on their studies and to be more sociable. Some students may also take their phones with them and blow off class where they lose time on learning. Besides, unless they are using their phones during an emergency, students are probably not doing anything productive on their phones and instead are watching videos and playing video games. I think everyone, including myself, would agree that students don’t really need to use their phones during the school day unless for something school related. However, some schools are going way too far in their efforts to keep students off their phones.

On the other side of this debate, many, including parents, are afraid of what would happen during an emergency situation. If something were to happen at a school where they have the YONDR phone pouches, students would have to run to one of these “unlocking stations” and wait for it to open their pouch, which they may not have the time to even do. A lot of parents are also probably worried about what happens if their child’s phone gets damaged. If schools take cell phones away, or force students to put them in phone pouches, who would you say is at fault if the phone is damaged under the school’s care? Most schools deflect and won’t take responsibility when a cell phone is damaged under their care. The only real time that a school will pay for a phone to be repaired is when clear negligence was shown in the handling of the cell phone.

Some other reasons why people are opposed to a cell phone ban is that it teaches students to not use technology in an age where it continues to grow. It would be best for students to learn to see technology as a helpful tool that they can become better at using instead of something that they shouldn’t use. If students aren’t adept at using technology, it will set them up for failure in the future.

I understand where schools are coming from in wanting students to not use their cell phones all the time. However, this whole debate wouldn’t even be an issue if students were able to moderate their own screen time and “go out and smell the roses” for once. Maybe parents should be stricter with their child’s screen time instead of having schools do it.

Some successful student-athlete tips for incoming freshmen -- Part I

Mary Prindiville, Freshman

Freshman year is a daunting task for most, especially student-athletes. The change between middle school and high school takes lots of adjusting, and some athletes enter the season completely unprepared for how to balance both sports and school. This can lead to missed homework assignments and lowered grades. As a student athlete who is also taking all honors classes this year, I faced these challenges. For our varsity volleyball team, we practice every weekday and typically have two or three games a week, as well as a weekend practice. In this article, I will share one of my tips that I discovered during the season to help me get all of my homework completed on time. I will continue with two more next week.

1. Keep your phone out of sight while doing homework.

Although sometimes I need my phone for homework or orchestra recordings, I tend to get very distracted by leaving it lying around near me. My brain is drawn to it, and I end up wasting time and having to continue my homework later into the night. The innocent thoughts of Let's just check my texts to Let's check my Instagram and Snapchat make it hard to focus on math problems. Time flies when you are looking at a screen. At the beginning of the season, I would come home from practice so exhausted that the only thing I wanted to do was scroll through my phone. Then, I would remember I had homework and become stressed. My solution to this was to keep my phone on my dresser. I like to listen to music when doing homework, so I would also connect my AirPods to my phone. I realized that I finished my homework forty-five minutes before I used to.

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