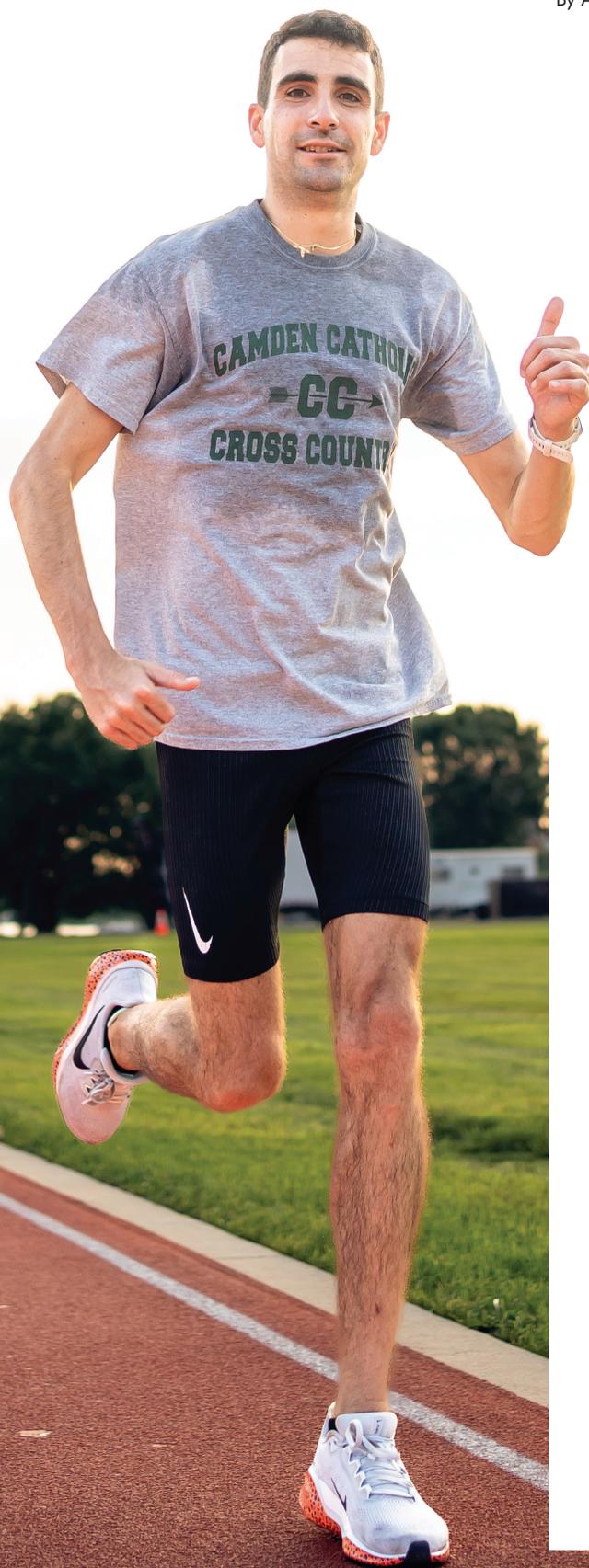


KEVIN MCDONNELL

The Focus of the Long-Distance Runner

By Alice Riehl | Photos by Nicole Shilliday, Nicole Shilliday Photography



It was a sweltering 95 degrees at 6:50 in the afternoon when we met our cover subject, Kevin McDonnell, at the Cooper River Track to take his picture for this issue. Rather than use our presence as a reason to take a break, he waved and said he still had three laps to go (we were a bit early). Such is the dedication and discipline of the elite long-distance runner. Kevin McDonnell not only has the physique and stamina to compete on the world stage in marathons, he also has the mental toughness. That's what led him to victory in this year's Broad Street Run, the first US runner in 30 years to break the tape.

Kevin grew up in Moorestown with his parents and three brothers. (Kevin is third.) Initially when he got to Camden Catholic High School, he concentrated on being a part of the soccer and basketball programs while competing in track during the spring season. It soon became clear that he had a talent for running. The Camden Catholic coach, Dennis Quinn, had his eyes on Kevin as a potential stand-out long-distance runner. What did Coach Quinn see in him? "Just look at him," says Quinn. It's true, McDonnell has the quintessential runner's build. lean and strong.

Once he began to concentrate on cross-country, there was no stopping him. He made the All-South Jersey team as a junior and was one of the favorites to win the NJ Meet of Champions in cross country as a senior. Then the unthinkable happened. He fractured the 5th metatarsal in his foot, resulting in him being off his feet and off the track for five months. He now says it was "the biggest adversity" he has faced as a runner.

He could have seen his injury as a sign to quit, but instead, once he was back on his feet, he redoubled his efforts, regaining his strength through cross-training in addition to running. His goal, which seemed out of reach, was to win the Non-Public A state title in the 3200 meter run and compete at Nike Outdoor Nationals. Through hard work, discipline, and willpower he ended up winning the 3200 Non-Public A state title and went on to earn High School All-American honors by finishing 3rd at Nike Outdoor Nationals in the 5000m run.

From there he enrolled in St. Joseph University in Philadelphia; he was enticed by the chance to work with great track coach Mike Glavin and to compete on the Division 1 level. In his career, he made two NCAA finals in cross country in 2010 and 2011, won the 2012 Atlantic 10 Conference title in the 10,000 meter run, won the College 5000m at the Penn Relays, and earned All-American honors placing 10th in the 2013 NCAA D1 Outdoor Track and field championship 10,000 meter run.

After graduation, Kevin decided to concentrate his efforts not on running but on establishing his career and strengthening his personal life. He took a position at Resource America where he began his accounting and private equity career and developed his business acumen.

Still, he did not abandon running altogether. As a way of giving back, he became an assistant coach for the Camden Catholic cross-country team. Kevin influenced several student-athletes who would go on to run in college, including two who would later become two of his closest friends, Matt Coffey and Richard Castañeda. In the 2018-2019 school year Matt broke Camden Catholic's school record in the 1600 and Richard was named to the NJ All-State team in cross country.

In 2017, Kevin moved to Cherry Hill and that same year took a new position at Hamilton Lane Advisors, located in Conshohock-



Richard Castañeda, Kevin McDonnell and Matt Coffey.



Kevin with Camden Catholic Boys track team and coaches. From Left: Noah Schneider, Dylan McGrath, Joseph Parsons, Christopher Parsons, Matt Coffey, Richard Lang, Richard Castañeda (squatting), Declan Walsh, Dennis Quinn, Kevin McDonnell.



Camden Catholic Girls Track team, 2023-2024. Grace Ramirez, Brynn Deiwert, Mary Picciano, Briana Deiwert, Coach Joe Murtin, Nilaa Ponnappan, Sophia Tilelli. (Picture supplied by Joseph Murtin)

en, PA., where he is a Sr. Associate on the Investor Services team.

Then, in March 2020, the world changed. The pandemic hit and Kevin, like most of the country, had to work from home. Without the commute, he had an extra two hours a day; he decided to spend that time getting healthier and he started running in earnest again. He soon regained his desire to run at a competitive level. He began training with Matt and Richard, who were taking remote classes at St. Joe's and Rider University, respectively. He says his friends helped to set the tone for training and to reignite his passion for running. He also started working with a new coach, Steve Shaklee, from Cherokee High School.

His ultimate goal at the time was to qualify for the Olympic trials, a competition for the very best of elite long-distance runners. Three and a half years later, in February of this year, he reached that goal, after posting a 2:17:22 at the 2023 Chicago Marathon. Now he is training for upcoming races, the first being the Twin Cities marathon in Minnesota, taking place in October, followed by the New York City Marathon in November.

What does it take to be among the best long-distance runners in the world? Kevin says that it is as

much a mental challenge as a physical one. It takes immense discipline to get up every morning before work and run, and then do it again when you get back home in the evening. Kevin arises before dawn and runs between 10 and 22 miles before he gets ready to commute to Conshohocken. When he returns to Cherry Hill in the early evening, after a 45-minute to 1-hour commute, he is back out running between 6 and 11 miles. He usually runs around his neighborhood and his childhood area of Moorestown and Maple Shade. But every now and then he circles the Cooper River Park Track, where he often shares the facility with the Camden Catholic track teams and serves as an inspiration and example to them. (See photos above.)

What is on his mind during these hours-long training sessions? Kevin says that he is totally focused on the goal, i.e. the finish line. He knows that if he doesn't put the work in somebody else will. He takes a mental survey of his body, noting any stress points and trying to address them while keeping up the pace.

Unlike most of us, I suspect, he does not think about what he's having for dinner, or what he will do for the weekend. He focuses on his goals. A lesson, perhaps for us all.



FIVE QUESTIONS

What is your favorite local restaurant?

Sal & Joe's, Maple Shade

What is your favorite beach town?

North Wildwood

What is your favorite sports team?

Eagles

What is your favorite leisure activity?

Working out at Life Time Fitness

What is your favorite TV show?

Game of Thrones

