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Goal-oriented sophomore leads Walton

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Leila Norman has high expectations for herself.

With a county and region title and a second-place state finish, the Walton sophomore established herself as one of the top girls high school cross country runners in the state in her second year of cross country.

As a result, Norman was selected as the Marietta Daily Journal/Cobb County girls cross country runner of the year.

However, Norman is bothered by one goal that has eluded her grasp this season - breaking the 19 minute mark.

For Norman, breaking 19 minutes is one goal she is bound and determined to reach.

"At the beginning of the season, I always set goals for myself and I keep trying and trying to accomplish them," Norman said. "When I set a goal, I keep to it and I'm not really satisfied until I accomplish it."

Norman will have one more chance to run under 19 minutes as she competes in the Foot Locker Southeast Regional meet in Charlotte, N.C., on Nov. 26.

It was her performance in last year's Foot Locker meet that set the tone for Norman's 2005 season as she finished the race with a time of 19:41, breaking 20 minutes for the first time in her brief career.

Norman said her performance in the 2004 Foot Locker race helped her take a step forward in her performance level.

"It boosted my confidence," Norman said. "It made me feel I was capable of being more successful."

Norman said she also benefited from a less strenuous training regiment during the offseason, reducing the amount of mileage she ran, but increasing the quality of her workouts.

"I improved my offseason training and I focused more on quality than quantity," Norman said. "I avoided overtraining and I didn't wear myself out as much."

Norman maintained a consistent level of excellence from beginning to end with two wins, three second-place finishes, two third-place finishes and one fifth-place finish and stayed under 20 minutes in all eight 5K races she ran this season.

Her two wins came at the Cobb County and Region 6AAAAA meets, winning the county meet with a time of 19:46.33 and the 6AAAAA meet with a PR of 19:02.87.

In the Class AAAAA state meet, Norman was in second place for most of the race, right behind Collins Hills' Jackie Drouin, before being passed by Drouin's Collins Hill teammate Erin Guglielmo in the last 500 meters of the race and falling to third.

Walton coach Tom Williams was pleased with the progress that Norman made this season.

"Obviously, she had an excellent season," Williams said. "She was the No. 1 runner entering the season and she was able to maintain that status throughout the season is a testament to her improved mental and physical strength. She ran against some very tough competition and she more than held her own."

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