

September 14, 2026

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SportsTone.net

RANDLEMAN - A lot of people love to jog, giving them an opportunity to clear their head and get some exercise.

Randleman High School's Laurel Bernhardt loves to do it just for those reasons as well as staying in shape for basketball, a sport she hopes to play collegiately one day. Add to that the mental strength needed to succeed in cross country and the benefits are plenty for those who choose cross country running.



Bernhardt has combined all those benefits to become one of the top cross country runners in the area and, after three years at Providence Grove High School, is finishing her prep career at RHS where she is competing for the Tigers cross country team.

"It is a little different," Bernhardt said of the courses at Providence Grove and Randleman high schools. "I like the course at Randleman. It gives you a little bit of everything. It has hills, some sun, some shade, some roots and some flat areas. It kind of gives you everything. It's a little more challenging and it will help me be a better runner."



Randleman senior Laurel Bernhardt. Photo provided.

Bernhardt is looking to qualify for her fourth straight NCHSAA state championship meet. She has finished 9th, 40th and 11th her first three years and has definite goals for her senior season.

"I definitely want to be in the top 10 this season," said Bernhardt, whose personal best time is 19 minutes, 56 seconds. "And I want a PR (personal record). Things have been going good. The workouts are good and I'm excited."

Bernhardt, who ran some 5K races with her family as a youngster, said she didn't become competitive until her freshman season in high school. It was then she said she realized all the benefits running has.

"The past three years, running, and the sports I have played, have helped me get mentally stronger, so in the races, that has helped me push through," Bernhardt said. "It's gotten a little bit easier and I'm not as stressed out as much as I was my freshman year."

The Tigers competed in the prestigious Friday Night Lights at the Ivey Redmon Sports Complex in Kernersville on Friday with Bernhardt finishing fourth among nearly 200 runners. Her time was 20:15.

Randleman has a very young cross country team. While Bernhardt has led the Tigers in their competition, the next three RHS finishers have been underclassmen. It allows Bernhardt to take on another role.

"I just want to be there for them and keep encouraging them," Bernhardt said. "Cross country is definitely hard. It's easy some days, but some days are really hard. I want them to do their best and all of ours goal is to win the conference championship and I want to lead them to that."