

RAFAEL LIMA MARTINEZ

Dedicated distance runner has much more to offer than just speed



Brayden Adcock | Staff Writer

It's mid-afternoon on the track of a neighboring high school. Students and coaches stand anxiously on the light green turf. The wind shifts westward. Racers from the previous event make their closing pass, sparking a dialogue among their peers about "split times" and the hesitation that comes with being a part-time student athlete. The 800-Meter Relay event is about to start.

The track, as dry and cracked as it's ever been, is packed lane by lane with young athletes. Tension can be felt piercing through the air. Right now, everyone's in it for themselves. All of a sudden, a man with a starting pistol begins to exclaim: "On your mark..."

Bang! The race has finally begun. One student sits on a blanket at the corner of the field, watching as some of their friends pass by on the track. Everyone running looks determined to win, including the Lincoln Southeast High School (LSE) sophomore Rafael Lima Martinez. When he turns the corner, though, it feels different. His scrunched face and striking posture accentuate his athletic capabilities.

Off the field, Martinez, affectionately nicknamed "Raf" by his peers, is an average high school student in Lincoln. At LSE, he's often found hanging out with friends in the cafeteria or attending a club meeting. Outside of school he's out and about, whether it be riding his bike around town or mowing lawns for neighbors. But even with a plethora of activities and hobbies under his belt, including computer building, Martinez still finds the time for athletics.

As a student at LSE, Martinez has participated in three different sports: cross country, wrestling, and track & field. These sports, each spanning three different

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seasons, are just the cherry on top in Martinez's repertoire. Track, in particular, is what he happens to be working through right now. As for where his motivation lies, he has a few things that keep him going.

"There are a lot of motivators that cause me to keep running," Martinez said. "One is competition. I know that others are running hard and putting in work everyday and because of that it helps remind me I need to do the same in order to compete."

Competition dominates the landscape of high school sports, but an even more important factor is one's own reasons to push through. Although community often creeps in for support every so often, intrinsic motivation fulfills this innate desire for self-motivation, giving students the energy to engage in the sometimes brutal world of long distance running. This sentiment is echoed by Martinez's love for cross country.

"I'm interested in Cross Country because it's really difficult and unlike any other sport," Martinez said. "You really have to reach inside your head and put everything you got into it. It makes you feel like you really gave it your all when you finish."

The theme of hard work expressed by Martinez is carried over to track, as well.

"I find running hard," Martinez said. "I am always pushing myself. If it isn't hard [to practice], then you aren't usually working hard to get better. I feel as if it should always be hard to improve."

Martinez isn't afraid to use hard work to set himself apart from the competition, his sheer determination being evidence of this. But he's also not afraid to shed light on his family heritage.

"What really sets me apart is that I am a immigrant student athlete," Martinez said. "Being from Mexico at a young age, it really drives me and makes me feel different from everyone else. It makes me feel special in a way, and because of that I am the very first person in my family to do sports in the United States."

According to the Pew Research Center, there are more than 800,000 Mexican immigrants living in the US under the age of 21. This is 10 times less than the number of student athletes in the US, 8 million, per the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

Given his immigrant status, Martinez is heavily inspired by being the first in his family to run at



all, saying that he wants to be "one of the best" to do it in his family. Another major factor to his success are friends, who provide moral support for his endeavors.

"Friends are really important in my life," Martinez said. "They really cheer me up and are there when I need help. I end up talking to them a lot, inside and outside of school."

Track tournaments are very communal. Students are not only there to compete with each other, but to also cheer on teammates as they pass and bond with them on large tarps. To anyone competing there's a strong sentiment of love and dedication, but once they're on the track and the starting pistol goes off, it's all up to them.

Martinez is yet another example of the hard work and dedication it takes to compete in the world of track & field. Everyone has their reasons to succeed.