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Sami Keeps Her Dream of Running Cross-Country

OCTOBER 23RD 2013 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Submitted by

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United States - This isn't a local story, but hopefully you will be inspired by this amazing 17 year old girl who loves to run! Cross-country running hardly gets the recognition that it deserves. It's a difficult sport, just ask any Bearcat Cross Country Team member here in Dexter. The story of this young athlete is truly remarkable.

Sami Stoner, a legally blind girl from Lexington, Ohio, has inspired thousands across the country with her story of positivity, dedication and overcoming personal obstacles.

The 17-year-old athlete has never let her inability to see keep her from her dreams of running cross-country.

As an eighth grader, Stoner was diagnosed with Stargardt Disease, a form of juvenile macular degeneration that quickly took away her central vision, sparing only some peripheral sight. Although the condition prevents her from driving, it hasn't kept her from running, a sport she took up before her vision deteriorated.

During her first two years at Lexington High, Stoner ran alongside a friend, Hannah Ticoras, who sacrificed her own times to escort Stoner safely from start to finish. But after

Ticoras graduated in 2011, Stoner faced a dilemma.

Enter Chloe, an energetic golden retriever Stoner met last summer through Pilot Dogs Inc., a Columbus nonprofit that matches visually impaired individuals with guide dogs. The pair began running short stretches together during their month-long orientation in Columbus, eventually working up to the five-kilometer distance of Stoner's cross-country races.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association at first denied Stoner's request to compete in sanctioned races with Chloe, but the governing body ultimately relented, clearing the duo to debut at a Galion, Ohio, meet last September. Under safety measures agreed upon with the OHSAA, Stoner and Chloe start 20 to 30 seconds after other competitors and must finish outside narrow finish-line chutes, Harris said.

Although Stoner is ineligible to score -- only the fastest seven varsity times count at most meets, she said -- she finished in less than 30 minutes for the first time last fall. She credits trust in Chloe for bolstering her confidence and shaving seconds off her times. "She's always focused on what's ahead of us," Stoner said.

Approaching life with uncommon verve despite her disability, those close to her say, Stoner strives to be a positive role model for other visually impaired people, including a young girl she began mentoring recently.

But she's not stopping there. Now, Stoner has her sights set on the future. She hopes to [compete at the collegiate level](#) next year at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, her school of choice.

Stoner, who began losing her vision in eighth grade, has been overwhelmed by the support she's received in her community and beyond.

"I can't even wrap my head around how much support we have," [she told USA Today](#). "It's been so incredible. We're lucky to have it."

And of course, she couldn't have done it without her dog, Chloe. The Golden Retriever runs with Sami for miles, often through the woods. Chloe is now considered another member of the cross-country team.

Sami's father, Keith, is hopeful about his daughter's career as a runner, [saying](#), "I don't see a lot of limitations in her future."

Sami herself is no less optimistic about her future as a runner, and her attitude has been relentlessly positive.

"If you love something enough, you'll find a way to do it," [she told ABC News](#),
"Even if you have struggles."

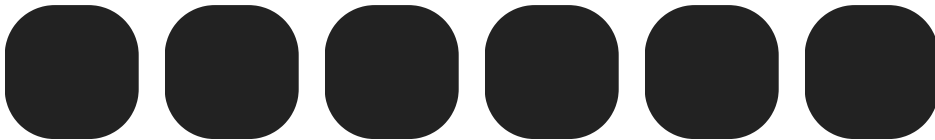
Pretty impressive and we should all remember that nothing is impossible if we just set our sights on a goal and GO FOR IT! Every person who reads this should be inspired by her positive attitude!

Dexter High School has a Cross Country Team and will be hosting a Meet this Saturday, October 26th at 10:00 a.m. Please come out and support the Bearcats as they run and enjoy a sport they truly enjoy and love! Go Bearcats!!!

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