

Another assault on the 4:00-minute mile in Chicago

A fourth annual attempt at “The Magis Miles,” a track festival and night of mile races at Chicago’s Saint Ignatius College Prep on Friday, June 1, 2018

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Chicago, IL—Each June for the last three years some of the top runners in the Midwest have attempted to be the first ever to run a sub-4:00 mile on an outdoor track within the city limits of Chicago.

There has never been an outdoor mile race in Chicago in which a runner has broken the 4:00-minute barrier, according to the Ryan Lamppa, from the organization “Bring Back the Mile.”

For the fourth year the Magis Miles will send runners to the starting line with that barrier in their sights. Have your stop watches ready at about 9:30 PM on Friday night, June 1, under the lights at Saint Ignatius College Prep.



To create more incentive this year, the Chicago Area Runners Association (CARA) has stepped forward with \$1,000 in prize money for a race winner who breaks 4:00. The elite runners mile race for both men and women now bears the CARA name: the CARA Mile.

In its first three years, the Magis Miles runners have been close: Former Eastern Michigan runner and Polish national champion Greg Kalinowski ran 4 minutes and 4.07 seconds to win in 2015. St. Olaf College’s NCAA Division III champion Jake Campbell won in 2016, running the meet record of 4:02.05. Last year Illinois’s top high school runner, Soren Knudsen of Minooka, charged from behind to beat a crew of collegians and professionals in 4:05.58.

On the women’s side, Hope Schmelzle from Northern Illinois University and Wheaton-Warrenville South High School ran the meet record of 4:43.96 to win in 2016.

“The Magis Miles” are a night of one-mile races in a spectacular setting, under the lights of the newly renovated Mailliard Track and Fornelli ‘51 Field and against the backdrop of a Chicago skyline—just a mile away. The night features elite races for top professional and collegiate men and women runners, multiple heats for top Illinois high schoolers, and an “under card” of open races for all-comers of all ages.

The under-card includes an open race for Saint Ignatius alumni. Some former Ignatius runners—several who are still running in college—are expected to race at Magis Miles, including Chris Korabik ’14, John Lennon ’15, and Kallin Khan ’15.

Magis (pronounced "MAH-jis") is a Latin word that means 'more' or 'better'. “At Saint Ignatius College Prep, we use the word Magis as an inspiration for doing more for others and our community,” says meet organizer Nate McPherson. “We hope this meet can be an expression of Magis for the running community.”

Athletes who have completed high school and college eligibility will compete for \$1,500 first-place prize money—plus a \$1,000 time bonus for breaking 4:00 for the men or 4:30 for the women.

But high school races will also be a central feature of the evening. In the first three years McPherson, assistant coach at Saint Ignatius, has recruited many of the top boy and girl runners in Illinois to race again, right the state championship meets in Charleston. For the last two years the fastest 1600-meter and one-mile races by Illinois high school athletes have been run at Magis Miles. In 2016 Sean Torpy from Carl Sandburg and Miami Univeristy of Ohio finished fourth in the men’s race in 4:05.10, with his twin brother Chris fifth in 4:07.13. Last year Knudsen won. Kelly O’Brien from Palatine and Northwest ran 4:48.01. Glenbard West high schooler Katelynne Hart won the women’s mile last year in 4:46.54.

More than 300 high school runners have raced at Magis Miles the last three years. “Our race has become a PR factory,” says McPherson. “Almost everyone who races runs a personal best.”

This year the high school races will get a formal name, the Ray Mayer '51 High School Mile, after Saint Ignatius class of 1951 alumnus Ray Mayer, a benefactor who gave the race the seed money to start in 2015. Mayer was a miler himself at Ignatius, at Loyola University, and for the University of Chicago Track Club, with a personal best of 4:12.

The men's and women's elite mile races remain a special attraction. Both races will put professional and collegiate runners—many of them with Chicago-area roots—on the track with one goal: To put on a show by running the fastest outdoor mile races in Chicago history.

In 2015 the meet crowd included Saint Ignatius and Loyola University alumnus Tom O'Hara. On March 6, 1964, O'Hara set a world indoor mile record when he ran 3:56.4 at the Chicago Stadium. O'Hara went on to run on the United States Olympic team that summer.

There has been one sub-4:00 outdoor mile in the Chicagoland area. Jim Spivey, another Illinois Olympian from Bensonville and Fenton High School and then Indiana University, ran 3:59.4 at North Central College in Naperville on May 17th, 1994.

“We think everyone needs more track and field in their lives, and we don't get enough of it in Chicago, especially,” said Saint Ignatius boys track coach Ed Ernst, one of the Magis Miles organizers. “When you watch our championship race, that is likely to be the fastest mile you will ever see in person.”

Bringing runners of different ages together is a big part of the event: “We are high school track coaches, first. So one big goal for this event is to put elite-level runners in front of our high school kids, so they can see what's possible.”

For the college runners in the meet, the race is often a homecoming: “When our high school hero runners graduate and move on to the college ranks, it seems like we never get to see them run again. This is an event where we bring the old Illinois heroes back to run in front of the new heroes.

“We have this beautiful facility in a beautiful city. We are excited to invite people to our campus for this event.”

And, finally: “When they put up light towers around our beautiful track four summers ago, the idea popped into our heads, just like in the movie ‘Field of Dreams. ‘A night of mile races in Chicago.’ That's our basic idea: We want to build this event. If we host it, they will come.”

The event will stream live over the Saint Ignatius student web broadcast station, WPSN, the Saint Ignatius Wolfpack Sports Network, which is accessible from the meet web site.

Admission is \$5.00, cash only. The events begin at 5:00 PM and will conclude at 9:30. The meet runs on a tight schedule, with the National Anthem at 7:00 PM and the final race concluded by 9:40 PM.

Billy Poole Harris, head boys cross country coach at Whitney Young High School and an announcer at the IHSA state meet, will handle the announcing duties.

Dick Pond Athletics and Saucony Running Shoes provide sponsor support for the event. CARA is now another meet sponsor.

FAT timing services were supplied by Dave Behof of LA Timing and Bob Geiger of Illinois Prep Top Timing. Results are posted on the meet web site and here: bit.ly/magmiles2018.

The Magis Miles track meet has an information web site: www.magismiles.com. Follow the meet on twitter: @themagmiles

To get more information, contact the event organizers, Saint Ignatius coaches Nathan McPherson (Nathan.mcpherson@ignatius.org) and Ed Ernst (Ed.ernst@ignatius.org), 773-407-5220..