

Dept. of Military Affairs: Three Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers qualify for All-Guard Marathon Team

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Three members of the Wisconsin National Guard marathon team earned a spot on the All-Guard Marathon Team during the National Guard Marathon Time Trials at the Omaha Marathon in September.

Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers Maj. Seth Kaste with Recruiting and Retention Battalion, Capt. Leah Baldwin with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation, and Pfc. Mason Grundy, a forward observer with Battery D, 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery were among the 44 runners named to the 2020-21 All-Guard Marathon Team, and will now travel the country to compete in select events as part of the All-Guard Military Competitions Program.

Kaste has been on the All-Guard Marathon Team ten times, qualifying for the first time in 2007. He said the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic affected some aspects of this year's time trials.

"This was the first year the time trials weren't at Lincoln, Nebraska in May, which was very different," Kaste said.

The Lincoln Marathon, which served as the official time trials for determining the All-Guard Marathon Team, was canceled this year due to coronavirus.

Instead, more than 125 National Guard athletes from 34 states and territories traveled to Omaha for time trials in September. Measures were also put in place to protect the athletes.

"The number of race participants was low enough along with the staggered start,

that we were able to socially distance ourselves during the race,” Kaste said. “It was the quietest marathon I’ve ever participated in because there weren’t many spectators.”

Still, Kaste said his training wasn’t affected aside from having time to train in the summer months, rather than preparing in winter for the normal May qualifier. He said he has made some good friends while competing with the All-Guard team.

“It’s great to be a part of a team of professional Soldiers and Airmen from across the country that share a passion for physical fitness and running,” Kaste said.

Baldwin agreed that the comradery and the experience has been great. This year was her third time competing in the time trials, and her third consecutive year making the team.

“Thus far, I’ve gone to Puerto Rico, California, Ohio, and of course Nebraska,” Baldwin said. “This year, I’ll be going to New Mexico and South Carolina. Next year, Alaska is on the docket, all of course pending COVID. Each time we meet as a team, it’s like a family reunion.”

While the marathon team members train on their own, Baldwin said many of them share their training on social media which helps to encourage others.

In Wisconsin, Baldwin also serves as the Wisconsin National Guard Marathon Coordinator. She took over the role in June 2019, and is responsible for communicating between the All-Guard coordinators to the Wisconsin National Guard marathon team, and vice versa. The role has been especially important this year due to changes and races being canceled due to COVID.

“Omaha was the first time some of the Wisconsin National Guard team members met each other,” Baldwin said.

Regardless, team members encourage each other when passing at turn-around points on the route, and maintain group texts and emails.

“We are going to have more Wisconsin National Guard team events during the year, which also helps motivate us and brings us closer together as a team,” Baldwin said.

This is Grundy’s third year as a member of the Wisconsin National Guard, and his

second consecutive year qualifying for the All-Guard team. He said the reason he joined the Wisconsin National Guard was to run competitively.

“When I was 19 I began to run marathons, and when I turned 24 I found out that they had a National Guard marathon team that I could literally run and get paid to do,” Grundy said.

“I kind of live for that pain of doing marathons,” he added.

Leading up to the Omaha Marathon, Grundy didn’t train as much as he usually would to prepare. The lack of preparation led to surprise as he was named as a member of the team.

“I have started running more since then, and the Wisconsin National Guard team just won the Fort McCoy 10-Miler,” Grundy said. “I did the ten-miler in 57 minutes.”

The Fort McCoy Ten-Miler took place Oct. 11 in conjunction with the annual Army 10-Miler held in Washington D.C. each year. This year’s Army 10-Miler which was run virtually. Grundy said that each race he runs helps him to improve for the next one.

The top National Guard runners selected for the 2020-21 All-Guard Marathon Team will travel the country to compete in select events as part of the All-Guard Military Competitions Program.

The three Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers who qualified for the All-Guard Marathon Team finished the Omaha Marathon with the following times:

Maj. Seth Kaste – 3:12:14

Pfc. Mason Grundy – 3:15:41

Capt. Leah Baldwin – 3:41:10