

FALL 2024

# OUT OF THE BLOCKS

The Official Newsletter of the Friends of Harvard Track & Field/Cross Country



Graham Blanks (Harvard Athletics)



(Left to Right): Zoe Cooper, Penelope Salmon, Ella Gilson, Molly Malague, Annelies Quinton, Sophia Gorriaran (Harvard Athletics)



## *A LETTER FROM COACH SARETSKY*

***Dear Friends of Harvard Track and Field/XC,***

Just when you think the program has reached the highest heights, Harvard T&F/XC continues to astound. I am amazed at the accomplishments and accolades current and former members of our program are achieving. Since our last newsletter, which you can read [here](#), five Crimson shined at the Olympics in Paris, representing four different countries and capturing four gold medals. Gabby Thomas '19 won three of those gold medals representing Team USA, winning the 200m and the 4x100 and 4x400m relays. I was fortunate to be among the 80,000 spectators to see the 200m finals in-person, and it was an amazing experience. Lisa Tertsch '20, competing for Germany in the mixed relay triathlon, joined Gabby Thomas in winning gold. I was also lucky enough to see Stephanie Ratcliffe '23 follow up her NCAA Championship while at Harvard and compete for Australia in the hammer throw. Two members of last year's Harvard team continued their seasons all the way to Paris with Maia Ramsden '24 representing New Zealand in the 1500m and Graham Blanks '25 (Athens, GA) wearing the red, white and blue of the USA in the 5000m.

The momentum from Paris carried over back in Cambridge and into the academic year, and the excitement on campus has been palpable. Both of our cross country teams had fantastic seasons, including runner-up finishes at the Ivy League Heptagonal Championships, which were hosted by Princeton. Graham Blanks won his second straight Heps title and followed that up with a win at the NCAA Regionals to lead the men's team to an automatic qualification to the National Championships. The women's team had to wait for an at-large selection and were the last team in. This marked the fifth straight time our men's team qualified for nationals, while our women's team has qualified four out of the last five years. At nationals, which were held in Madison, Wisconsin, the women's team outran their ranking to finish in

FALL 2024

## *A LETTER FROM COACH SARETSKY*

28th, while the men's team finished 27th. Graham Blanks followed up on his wins at Heps and Regionals to defend his national title in a new course record time of 28:37.2 for the 10k. Graham is the only Ivy Leaguer to ever win the NCAA Men's Cross Country Championship, and now he has done it twice!

Two weeks after the cross country season ended, Blanks and two other Crimson student-athletes extended their cross country fitness and opened up their indoor track season at BU. Shane Brosnan '26 (Orange, NJ) ran a 5k in 13:45.94, nearly 20 seconds faster than his personal best which was set last year. Sophia Gorriaran '27 (Providence, RI) opened up her indoor campaign with a 2:02.74 in the 800m, currently ranked 2nd in the nation. And Blanks was at it again, racing the 5k at BU and looking to improve on his 13:03 from last year. As we've become accustomed, he did not disappoint, lowering his school and Ivy League record mark to 12:59.89, 2nd fastest in collegiate history. Shortly after the race, Graham announced he would be forgoing the remainder of his collegiate eligibility to sign a professional contract with New Balance. He still plans to graduate this spring and will remain with the team in a non-competing role. Personally, I'm grateful for the extended time we had with Graham racing in a Harvard singlet, thanks in large part to the NIL deal he had with New Balance.

Back at the Gordon Indoor Track that same day as the BU meet, we hosted the fourth addition of the HBCU & Ivy Challenge with Howard, Delaware State, and Dartmouth joining us for a team-scored event to kick-off the indoor season. The women's team was able to hold on to a one-point win over Howard, 117-116 while our men were runners-up to Howard. Some of the highlights included Victoria Bossong '25 (Cumberland Foreside, ME) improving on her school and Ivy record in the 600m to run the 12th fastest time in NCAA history when she went 1:27.60. Timi Esan '27 (London, UK) got in on the record setting action, lowering the Harvard record in the 60m to 6.70.

The team is now in Final Exams where they are looking to maintain their stellar reputation in the classroom. Last year, Harvard men's track and field team achieved a 3.70 GPA, 2nd highest in the nation, while the women had a 3.68, tied for 26th across all Division One teams. The Crimson will be back to competing when they return to campus in January. Check out our full indoor schedule [here](#). We would love your continued support in cheering on the team at

FALL 2024

## *A LETTER FROM COACH SARETSKY*

meets and attending events, so please join us when your schedule allows. I'm also grateful for the financial support we receive from so many Friends. It would be great if we could set another record this year with more supporters than ever before. These donations go a long way toward helping our student-athletes pursue academic and athletic excellence, so I thank you in advance for your consideration. And I greatly appreciate those who have already donated.

All the best and Go Crimson!

Jason Saretsky

## *FRIENDS OF HARVARD T&F/XC GATHER IN PARIS FOR THE 2024 OLYMPICS*



*Left to Right: Clara Duffy '21, Izabella Sabharwal De Besseney '21, Tessa Medrano '21, James Lim '16, Grace Bertelli*



*Left to Right: Dr. D. Pulane Lucas P'22, Fredericka Lucas '22, Martha Kebeh '20, Jacob Ali- Wertheimer '21*

FALL 2024

## *A LETTER FROM THE FRIENDS CO-CHAIRS*

*Dear Friends,*

Harvard Track & Field/Cross Country hasn't slowed down since its tremendous season last spring. This summer, an unprecedented number of our current and alumni athletes competed in the Olympics. Although far from Cambridge, many former teammates and friends of Harvard Track made the journey to Paris to cheer our athletes on to glory. To see the vicarious joy and ready embraces of our athletes' teammates engendered a different type of pride, distinct and beyond athletic performance.

We want to thank and acknowledge Ngozi Musa '19, Martha Kebeh '19, and Steven Kelts '94, who somehow managed to secure a venue in Paris for friends to celebrate in the middle of the Olympics!

The Olympics span a brief period every four years, but the road to them is paved with years of athletes' efforts, determinations, and dreams. Similarly, HTF/XC's unprecedented success is the result of decades of support from you, the Friends of Harvard Track. We especially want to thank the members of the Crimson Club for going above and beyond in their contributions to the program.

We look forward to connecting with many of you next month at the annual Leslie Cooper Golemme '86 Friends & Family Meet (Friday, Jan 10, 2025) and the Team Banquet (Saturday, Jan 11). Registration can be found on the Varsity Club website.

Wishing very happy holidays to you and yours,

Evan Favermann Eisert '09 & Brian Panoff '98

## OLYMPIC Q&A WITH MAIA RAMSDEN '24

*Q: How did you balance academics and athletics at Harvard?*

A: I always get asked this question! If anything, I really hope the success of our program over the last couple years underscores how academic pursuits and athletic ones support each other. In my experience, focus on each made the other better. In fact, I initially really struggled in post-season competitions where I no longer had my academics as something else to focus on.

I think that the balance was made easier with the support of my coaches and teammates, too. Even if they jokingly rolled their eyes, both Gibby and the girls on the team were always happy to chat with me about my thesis, for example, or an interesting conversation I had in section. One of my fondest annual memories is sitting with the team on a picnic table at camp and everyone debating what the best classes to take in the upcoming semester would be. I waited to choose my courses just so I could discuss it with the team. I recognize, too, that I had a fantastic advisor within my concentration—they played basketball at Columbia and so really understood the lifestyle and different commitments I was engaged with. By and large though, it is the integration of my school-life with my running one that made the balance possible.

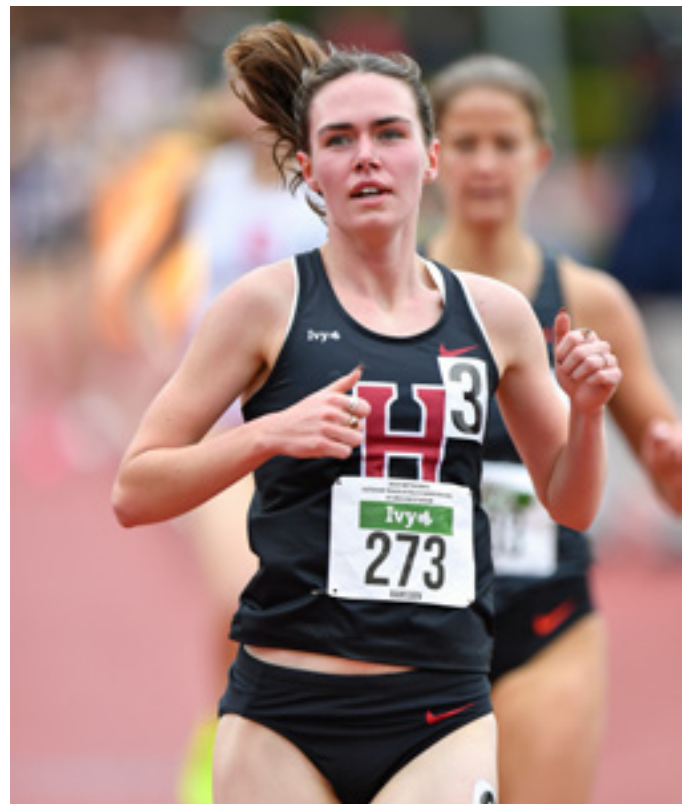
*Q: How did Harvard help prepare you for the Olympics?*

A: As I think most reading this can attest, Harvard is a place full of stress—the silver lining of that is you quickly learn skills to manage that stress. That was huge in the buildup to the Games for me. I also think Harvard is a place where everyone is passionate about what they are doing; whether that is athletics or a specific academic goal or their orchestra club—you name it. I've spoken to some of my closest friends from college about this in the months since we've all left Cambridge, and we agree that we took that passion for granted. I haven't found as much of it in the "real" world. In Paris though, it was there.

Walking around the village everyone was focused and excited about what they were there to do. Harvard did not necessarily prepare me for that part but instead made it a familiar feeling. I was excited to talk to people about their passions just as I had in college.



Maia Ramsden '24 (Harvard Athletics)



Maia Ramsden '24 (Brian Panoff '98)

## OLYMPIC Q&A WITH MAIA RAMSDEN '24

**Q: How was your Olympic experience?**

A: My Olympic experience feels like a dream. The village is all-encompassing. When I left after spending 10 days there, it was almost as if I'd forgotten how to be in normal life. I have to pay for coffee? Fresh baguette is not a few steps from my bed? Something I was not prepared for was how little it ended up being about the actual running. Don't get me wrong: every waking moment was geared towards those four-odd minutes on the track. I will not forget the first time I heard 80 000 people screaming when we walked out of the marshaling area (thank you to my friend who had given me a heads up about how loud this was—I was taken aback!). But really what I remember are the other athletes I got to meet and have conversations with and how my family came from all over the world to be there and share in something. Not that I was ever an Olympic skeptic, but I say even more now that I believe in what the Olympics are about, that spirit is unmatched.

From a performance standpoint, I gave it my all. The ending was a little bittersweet as I missed the final by just a few hundredths of a second in my semi-final. Another runner whom I really look up to told me as we were cooling down that "I would make that final when I was ready to compete there." I took a lot of solace in those words: I'm excited to try and qualify for LA in four years and be competitive in the final. Hopefully see everyone there!!

**Q: Do you have any advice for current members of Harvard Track and Field/XC?**

A: Getting hist&lit for a second, the temporality of track and field, and professional sports more broadly, is a funny thing. My life changed drastically in the span of four minutes and eight seconds at the end of my junior year at NCAAs. Gibby would probably say that, actually, the change was made every hour of practice that year, and the one before, and the one before. That is the funny thing about time in this sport: moments are built on lots of minutes that people will never see (as cliché as it sounds!). Often, once the ball starts rolling, things seem to speed up, and that's how it felt this year—it was a whirlwind! With all that in mind, my advice really is just to keep going. More importantly, to strive for consistency. It may feel long, or repetitive, and start to get boring. That is the nature of this sport—those weeks stack to become months and years and then a moment happens that crystallizes the work you've put in. In my experience, you don't necessarily know when that will be, so you just need to be as ready as you can.



Maia Ramsden '24 (Harvard Athletics)



Maia Ramsden '24 (Brian Panoff '98)

## OLYMPIC Q&A WITH STEPHANIE RATCLIFFE '23

**Q: How did you balance academics and athletics at Harvard?**

A: I relied on schedules, lists, and thoughtful prioritization. Creating a detailed schedule was essential—I blocked out time for classes, studying, training, sleep, meals, and prehab/rehab. I also made lists to stay organized and focused. The key was being realistic about what could be achieved within the available time and prioritizing effectively to ensure I stayed on top of both academics and athletics without overwhelming myself.

**Q: How did Harvard help prepare you for the Olympics?**

A: Harvard taught me invaluable lessons both on and off the track, but the most impactful lessons weren't academic or athletic—they were how Harvard shaped me as a person. Being a student-athlete at Harvard required me to be efficient, adaptable, and flexible with my time. It taught me how to shift my perspective during overwhelming situations, focusing on positives and reducing stress. I learned that perfection is often an illusion; life is unpredictable, and success comes from doing our best with what we can control. In fact, some of my greatest achievements have come from moments when I felt far from perfect. Harvard helped me realize that the lessons we don't expect are often the ones we need most, and this perspective helped me prepare for the challenges of my Olympic season.

**Q: How was your Olympic experience?**

A: Going to the Olympics this year was an unforgettable experience. The energy in the stadium was electric, and I couldn't help but smile and take it all in. Representing Australia on the world's biggest stage was an incredible honor, made even more special by having my family and friends in the crowd and knowing so many others were cheering from all around the world.

**Q: Do you have any advice for current members of Harvard Track and Field/XC?**

A: My biggest advice is to be kind to yourself. Being a student-athlete at Harvard is an incredible opportunity, but it also comes with its share of busy and stressful moments. It's easy to get caught up in the grind, and sometimes this energy can turn negative. Remember, you're human too. Take small moments to recharge and fill up your cup, no matter how busy you are, so you can bring your best, positive energy to everything you do.



Stephanie Ratcliffe '23 (Brian Panoff '98)



Stephanie Ratcliffe '23 (Brian Panoff '98)

## OLYMPIC Q&A WITH LISA TERTSCH '21

**Q: How did you balance school and academics at Harvard?**

A: I tried to balance school and academics by having very clear priorities, and these priorities changed over time. And I tried to balance out the load and not have unrealistic expectations of what I could handle in school and academics. It really helped to have an organized schedule and know what I had to do at each time of the day, even if that “thing” on my schedule was rest.

**Q: How did Harvard help prepare you for the Olympics?**

A: Harvard helped me to deal better with pressure, so even when it seemed like there were high stakes involved, for example, at an important exam, I could stay calm and do what I needed to do to perform well. That same skill helped me when I was standing at the start line of the Olympics. I told myself I have prepared well and I just need to do what I trained my body and mind to do and nothing more—and that really helped me to perform up to my ability.

**Q: How was your Olympic experience?**

A: It was very exciting, but also a bit overwhelming as it was my first time at the Olympics, and I had to figure out how everything works. Before the races, I was very focused on making sure that I did everything that I needed to perform well because I knew we had a chance to medal—even if that preparation meant missing out on some fun experiences. But after my races, I was able to soak it all in and enjoy the village and the other sports events.

**Q: Do you have any advice for current members of Harvard Track and Field?**

A: My main advice would be to be patient and move forward at your own natural pace and experiment--do not be afraid to try new things and be ok if some of your experiments fail. And for me, it is very important to make the day-to-day process enjoyable and rewarding in itself, because I feel like the big successes only come with long-term commitment and work, and, if it is not enjoyable, you quit when it becomes hard and challenging.



Lisa Tertsch '21 (Brian Panoff '98)



Lisa Tertsch '21 (Brian Panoff '98)

## OLYMPIC Q&A WITH GRAHAM BLANKS

*Q: How did you balance academics and athletics at Harvard?*

A: I found that time management was the biggest key to balancing academics and athletics. Making sure that I cut out time during my days for school work and allowing myself time set aside for training helped me compartmentalize these two responsibilities and succeed in both.

*Q: How did Harvard help prepare you for the Olympics?*

A: Competing for Harvard in the NCAAs definitely prepared me for the Olympic racing environment. NCAA Championships along with conference and regional championships are invariably chaotic and require quick decision making and a level head. Bringing this experience to the Olympics helped me progress through the preliminary round.

*Q: How was your Olympic experience?*

A: I thoroughly enjoyed my Olympic experience. It was amazing to compete in front of a crowd of 80,000 (twice) while representing the USA. It was equally amazing to spend time with my friends and family in Paris to celebrate the accomplishment.

*Q: Do you have any advice for current members of Harvard Track and Field/XC?*

A: If I could give any advice to those competing for Harvard, it would be to take risks. Great accomplishments oftentimes lie on the other side of fear. Without the risks I've taken in competition and training the last 4 years, I would've certainly never accomplished the things I have with Harvard Track and Field/XC.



Graham Blanks (Brian Panoff '98)



Graham Blanks (Brian Panoff '98)

## ***HOW TO SUPPORT HARVARD TRACK & FIELD/CROSS COUNTRY***

### ***DONATE ONLINE:***

[Click here](#) and select "Track and Field/Cross Country" from the drop down menu.

### ***MAKE A GIFT BY PHONE:***

Contact Alumni Development Services at 617-495-1750.

### ***DONATE BY CHECK:***

Checks should be payable to Harvard University and include the donor's name, year (if applicable), and sport designation. Checks must be postmarked by June 30 to count towards this fiscal year.

Mail checks to:

President and Fellows of Harvard College

PO Box 419209

Boston, MA 02241-9209

### ***MATCHING GIFT PROGRAMS:***

Many employers sponsor matching gift programs and will match contributions made to Harvard by their employees. Click [here](#) to find out if your or your spouse's company has a matching gift program.

### ***GIFTS OF STOCK:***

Click [here](#) for instructions on how to make a gift of stock.

### ***DONOR ADVISED FUND GIFTS:***

Click [here](#) for instructions on how to make a gift through your Fidelity, Schwab, or BNY Mellon donor advised fund.

### ***PLEDGES:***

Contact Jennifer Downing, Associate Director of Development, Athletics at [jdowning@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:jdowning@fas.harvard.edu) to make a multi-year pledge of \$1,000+ per year.

FALL 2024

## 2024-25 TEAM HONORS

### *Men's Cross Country*

27th at NCAA Championships

2nd at NCAA Northeast Regional Championships

2nd at Ivy League Heptagonal Cross Country Championships

10th at Pre-Nationals

### *Women's Cross Country*

28th at NCAA Championships

4th at NCAA Northeast Regional Championships

2nd at Ivy League Heptagonal Cross Country Championships

22nd at Pre-Nationals



*Left to Right: Sola Mahoney '80, Hasan Kayali '78, Bruce Brooks '80*



*Mark Ramsden P'24 on the left and Steven Kelts '94 on the right*

**HARVARD**  
TRACK & FIELD

