

## Track is Back for Colby Zarle, Wellesley Hills Resident and Runner at Brown University

Kelcie Zarle

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MAY 2020 -- As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to fill many college students with great uncertainty about their upcoming semesters, the decision made in late May by Brown University's president, Christina Paxson, and athletic director, Jack Hayes, to cut multiple varsity sports including men's track and field and men's cross country, left over 150 student-athletes, including Wellesley resident, Colby Zarle '23, with even more uncertainty about their collegiate futures- *to transfer or not to transfer?*

The decision to demote men's indoor and outdoor track and field and men's cross country -along with men's and women's fencing, men's and women's golf, men's and women's squash, women's skiing and women's equestrian - from varsity status to that of club status, was made as part of the "Excellence in Brown Athletics Initiative". This initiative sought to improve the competitiveness of Brown's teams in the Ivy League. This initiative did not, however, take into account the fact that men's track and field and men's cross country had historically been competitive for over a hundred years. Instead, it crushed the dreams of many runners - who in some cases turned down scholarship offers - that chose to attend Brown University for Brown.

Though heart-wrenching, this decision did not stop these athletes from trying to save their athletic - and academic - futures at Brown. With the help of current, past and prospective athletes, a Change.org petition to "Retain Brown University Men's Track and Field and Cross Country to Varsity Status," received over 50,000 signatures and numerous cash donations. This, along with all of the other feedback from Olympic Athletes and other Ivy League coaches, that Paxson and Hayes received - and certainly did not expect to receive when they made their initial decision to cut the teams - led to the reversal of their decision. They acknowledged that their decision was a mistake and gave back men's track and field and men's cross country the varsity status it deserved - *track was back!*

Brown University student-athletes, like Zarle, were elated to hear the news. "With everything going on in the world right now, the initial decision just added to the stress because we were all so blindsided by it," said Zarle. "I didn't want to leave Brown, but I also didn't want to run club. I put my name in the Transfer Portal to keep my options open in case I did decide to transfer so I could continue to run at the varsity level somewhere else."

"I became really hopeful that I would be staying at Brown when the petition hit about 30,000 signatures," Zarle said. "There is no way that our president or athletic director expected this kind of backlash, so it was nice to see for myself but also prove to them just how many people across the country supported our team!"

Zarle has been running competitively since sophomore year at Wellesley High School. "I was cut from the soccer team, which was devastating, but I guess everything happens for a reason because it allowed me to find my passion for running," said Zarle. "My mom, who ran track at the University of Pennsylvania, really wanted me to try it out. At first, I was really

hesitant but once I started running and getting faster, I began to realize why she loved it so much! It's honestly addicting."

Senior year Zarle set a personal record (PR) of 4:17.79 in the outdoor track mile. He also set a PR of 15:43.0 in 5,000 meters for Cross Country. He committed to Brown University senior year because he thought it was the best of both worlds in terms of being able to compete in the Ivy League while also getting a great education.

"I chose Brown for a reason," said Zarle. "I am super excited that I will be able to finish out my four years running for Brown. My goal is to run in the Ivy League Heptagonal Cross Country Championships (which we also call HEPS) at some point in my career. Right now, I am just focused on training hard so I can continue to improve and get faster."

Zarle looks forward to altitude training out in Colorado this summer with some of his Brown teammates. He also looks forward to his future cross country and track seasons now that he knows he will continue to run with the Brown "B" on his chest, just as he once did with Wellesley's "W."

*Go get them, Colby! Your Wellesley fans will be cheering you on all the way from Wellesley to Providence!*