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# Run Around Roa Queens girl takes her talent on the road

BY STEVE MOSCO

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A track star from Jamaica keeps Queens in her heart as she pounds the New England pavement, collecting accolades and running circles around the competition.

Karen Roa, a former Terrier and three-year letterwinner with St. Francis Prep, entered the University of Massachusetts (UMASS) filled with excited nerves and anticipation. Now a senior, the 21-year-old looks back on her years of running with pride – and she looks toward her future with the same excited nerves and anticipation that once preceded her college years.

After college, she plans on attending medical school to continue studying kinesiology, her major at UMASS. The study of human movement, kinesiology is the perfect fit for an active girl like Roa.

"I've always been active, always been

involved in sports," said Roa, who started running during her sophomore year at St. Francis Prep after a chance encounter with the school's track team. "My main priority was to stay in shape for the tennis team – that's why I started running."

The women's track and field coach at Prep, Jim May, convinced her to run at some track meets. Competition and camaraderie combined to build a desire within Roa to stay with the team and run full time. While running for Prep, she won every cross country meet except for one. Some of her milestones include the two-mile in 11:10 as a junior, the 2000m steeplechase in 7:06 and the 3000m in 10:51 as a sophomore.

That might sound like a lot of running, but according to Roa, it is nothing compared to running UMASS as a Minutewoman. In college, runners have to put in a lot more mileage – and with more mileage comes more training and more chance for injury.

"In high school I probably did 25 miles per week, and in college it's more like 40 to 50 miles per week," she said. "The coaches do a great job of transitioning runners to that amount of running. It's important to build up the body so it doesn't break down. You do that by doing base training in the summer before you even get to school."

Before she even got her base training down, Roa said that her time running in high school prepared her for the rigors of college.

And that preparation paid off. During her freshman year, she turned heads at the NCAA Regionals, the Atlantic 10 Championships and the Albany Invitational. During her sophomore year, she set a new school record in the 3000m steeplechase on three separate occasions and during her junior year, she led the team at the NCAA Regional Championships.

Also, being a runner gifted her with a cache of friends, making the move from Queens to Massachusetts a far smoother transition.

"I didn't feel any real pressure heading into college. It was a new environment and I was excited to meet new people," she said. "It helped having [track] girls

as a support system. It's hard to make friends as a freshman, but when you're on the track team, your friends are a given."

That's not to say that Roa doesn't miss Queens. As most college kids can relate to, she sometimes thought about how different her college town was compared to her home in Jamaica. She missed home a lot, but was comforted in the fact that it was only three hours away.

"I missed the energy and the speed of home. It's so fast there, while here it's a very calm little town. It's nice and I definitely enjoy it, but Queens is what I love," she said. "This was the perfect school for me because home was only three hours away, yet it's important to find your own way a bit and stand on your own two legs."

After standing – and running – on her own two legs at UMASS, Roa is ready for life's next race. No matter what, she knows she will also have a support system running in tandem.

"I definitely want to make my parents happy and they've been supportive of everything I do," she said. "It's good to know that no matter what, I'll always have a good background support system."

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Karen Roa is running toward life after college.