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Joe Melcher sets the pace at Lew-Port

By Ryan Nagelhout [Niagara Gazette](#)

LEWISTON — Joe Melcher knows what it's like to look up to a senior runner as a freshman, so becoming that respected runner is something he takes a lot of pride in.

The Lewiston-Porter cross country runner has taken the lead for a program that's finally starting to get up and running. Being the leader out of 25 runners is something Melcher says he's take to heart.

"It's pretty motivational," Melcher said. "To know you have to lead a whole team and keep them on the right track and motivate them to run harder."

Melcher's emergence as the Lancers' leader on the course is proof for coach Gary Raby that the program is moving in the right direction.

"This is the first year in three years where we have seniors," Lancers cross country Raby said. "Now each grade we have four or five runners."

Raby's Lancers once sported three freshman as is top runners, but with Melcher as a senior that means it was Joe's turn to be a role model for the freshman.

"Joe came a long way from a ninth grader," Raby said. "I tell the team 'You know guys, when Joe was a freshman he was like you.'"

Raby says the underclassmen have a hard time believing the sixth-year coach, but knowing where good runners start out is an important lesson for them to learn.

"With hard work and preparation you can become like Joe," Raby said. "You look at Joe as your idol or your leader, but with Joe it's practice. He has a work ethic."

For Melcher, the path to being a leader was laid out by a senior runner when he was an underclassmen.

"Jason Carminati was our leader," Melcher said. "So I kind of looked up to him and followed his footsteps."

The senior runner said he isn't much for yelling, but his coach knows the younger runners look up to him on the course. Raby said he can rely on Melcher to get the team motivated with his actions alone.

"Joe is a quiet leader," Raby said. "The younger guys try to emulate what Joe does in his practice and racing."

Melcher said a pair of goals remain in his high school career: Cracking the 17-minute mark on the course and making the all league team. Getting there will require one final push, but Melcher says he knows what it takes to get there.

"Physically you can do it," he said, "you just have to mentally put it in your head. If you block out all the other pain and distractions you can just run through it."

His coach knows Melcher can get there because he's seen him make those sacrifices before.

"You hit a little level, and if you have the mental focus you can go beyond it," Raby said. "You're tired and it's hard work but if you just break over that edge you can take off in your time."