

February 2018 - Stafford Harrison

For anyone who's ever wondered if there are age limits to falling in love with running, Stafford Harrison may be the best example that the answer is "no." Now four years old and a student at Mount Pisgah Christian School, Stafford has already run a dozen races, blazing his way through 50m Dashes all across Atlanta as part of the [Kilometer Kids Youth Running Series](#).

Stafford got a first taste of running at just two years old, as he teetered and tottered his way through his first race at a 50m Dash at a Kilometer Kids Fun Run at Grant Park. The youngest participant by far, he finished dead last, but with a big smile on his face.



"He was such a young two years old," his mother, Rachel, says. "We just put him in and he loved it, so we've entered him in almost every single one since then."

As Stafford has grown older, he's continued to improve his finishes, moving up and conquering each age group. Earlier this year he took the big step up from the three-and-under division to the four-year-olds.

"It was a little hairy," Rachel says about the move up. "But now he's one of the older four-year-olds and he loves it. And as soon as he hits six he'll run the mile."

To Rachel, his experience running and racing has brought out a new side of Stafford and

helped him develop as he's grown up.

"I feel like it's brought out a competitive spirit in him," she says. "That first year he had no clue about being competitive or trying to do his best and beat his time. Through that he's learned to keep getting better and better and when they blow the whistle he knows to go. It's brought a great competitiveness, not just to beat other people, but to beat yourself and know that you can get better and faster."

Competing against oneself and developing a growth mindset where children understand that they can always practice and improve at whatever they do – while having fun – is a key goal for the Kilometer Kids program. And that growing, inspired competitiveness is apparent when it's Stafford's turn to explain what he likes about running.

"My favorite part of the race is when I'm winning and I get nervous when someone's behind me," Stafford says, describing a love of that feeling familiar to many runners –

when someone is bearing down on them while hurtling towards the finish. Although the four-year-olds may not exactly be flying by, that racing spirit is already there.

Soon, Stafford will be taking his talents to Piedmont Park and the family will be watching him as he takes on the kid-friendly decathlon at [Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia Peachtree Junior](#). There he'll have the opportunity to try a range of new throwing and jumping events and further stretch his athletic capacities.

"[Running] is such a base and a basic thing for all sports," Rachel says. "No matter what sport he does this is going to benefit him more than anything else. No matter if he just becomes a runner for leisure or one that wants to compete, any sport that he does will have running in it."

And beyond Stafford's own development, the races have also provided Rachel and her husband Kent a consistent, enjoyable way to spend time together as a family on a few weekends each year.

"Every time he races it feels like I'm watching *Chariots of Fire* and I just start crying," Rachel says. "We always go as a family and we're all there with him and just love watching him. It's emotional for me watching him cross the finish line no matter where he finishes."

