

# Changing her course

Uniondale's Lowe forced to run for town's club team

BY JORDAN LAUTERBACH  
jordan.lauterbach@newsday.com

Uniondale's Deborah Lowe has been trying to figure out how to best navigate the uncertain world of high school athletics during the COVID-19 pandemic. She hopes a college scholarship waits on the other side, but what can she do to get there?

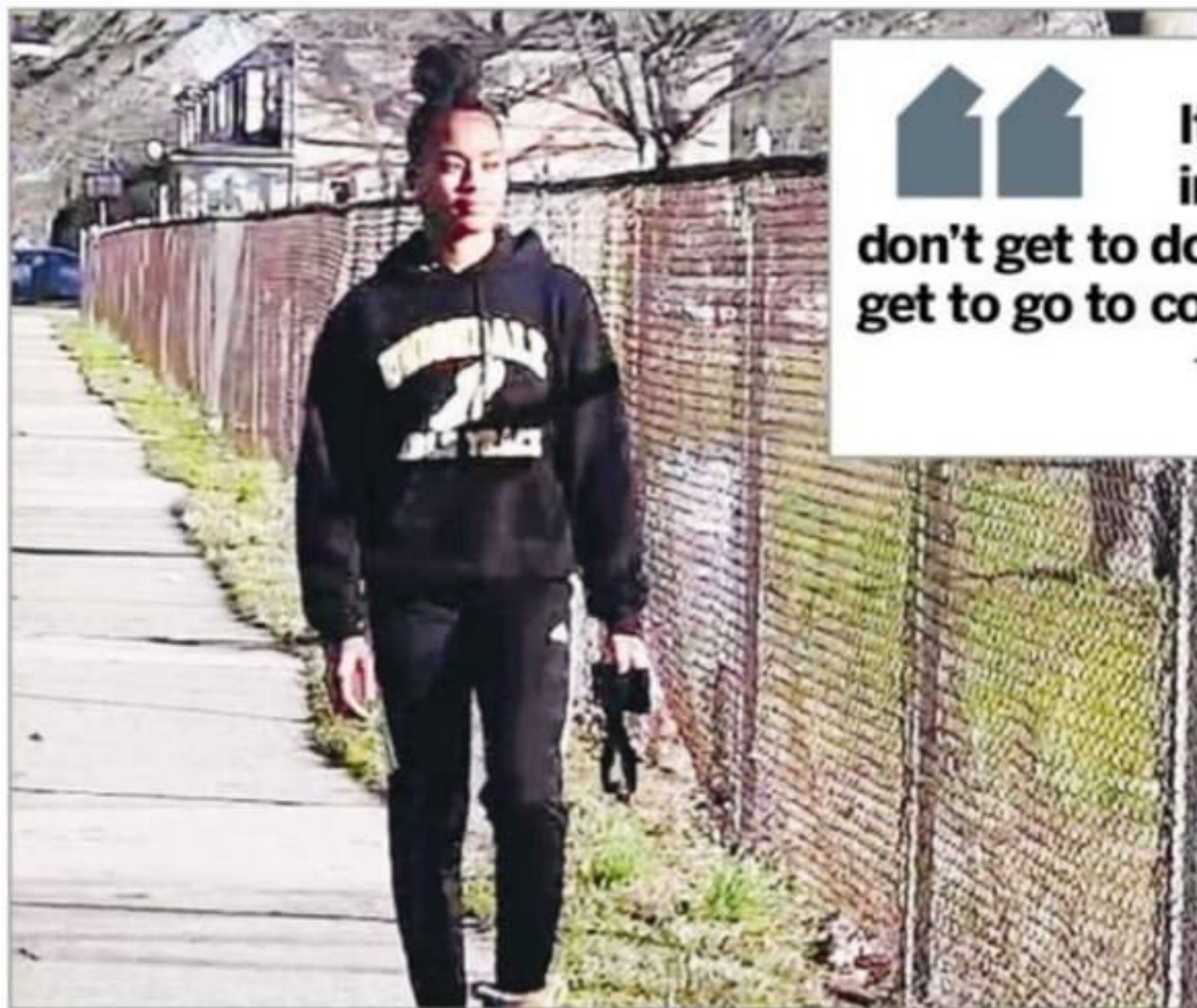
The most recent hurdle came earlier this month when her school canceled the winter sports season because of COVID-19 concerns. The news was a blow for Lowe, but not the final straw. The senior, who is being recruited by power conference Division I schools, according to coach Leigh Pollet, is still running competitively as part of Uniondale's club team.

"It's there for them as an escape valve," Pollet said of the team, citing the trying times that 2020 have brought.

Club teams have no affiliation with the high schools. They may have fewer athletes, as is the case with Uniondale, which Pollet said has eight runners. The clubs, though typically coached by the high school coach, are set up through USA Track and Field. Athletes pay a membership fee of \$25 per year to participate, according to their website.

This is common practice for national meets — such as the New Balance Indoor and Outdoor nationals — that are not typically sanctioned by schools. Because of increased COVID protocols and districts canceling the winter season, club teams may see an increase in activity this season.

A handful of other Long Island club teams have participated in meets at The Armory in Manhattan. The Huntington Xpress — made up of runners at Huntington High — made their debut at last weekend's Armory trials. They are composed of athletes who also are looking to put times on the desks of college coaches and, despite the fact that Suffolk is currently on track for outdoor competition in the win-



Deborah Lowe impressed in 400 meters (winning in 57.56 last weekend), has fastest time in state in 300.

ter season, see the club route as a welcome alternative to running around at home on a cold Saturday afternoon.

"It's very important," Lowe said of getting to run. "If I don't get to do this, I don't get to go to college."

Although teams sometimes can be looked at as an unsanctioned version of the high school team, that is not always the case. Huntington coach Ron Wilson said it's not against any rules for runners from other schools or districts to run on club teams from other areas for regular-season meets. The national meets, however, do have rules about "All-Star teams," he said. Wilson said he has extended an invitation to anyone in the Huntington community (or beyond) to join the Xpress.

The existence of the club allows Lowe and some of her teammates to compete in indoor events, of which there still are plenty at The Armory.

Lowe won the 400 meters in 57.56 seconds at last weekend's Armory Trials No. 5 meet. The

time is tops in the state and 10th fastest in the country as of Friday. Lowe also has the state's fastest time in the 300, a 41.50 run at Armory Trials No. 3 in November, according to [milesplit.com](http://milesplit.com).

Lowe has been invited to the VA Showcase in Virginia Beach in mid-January. Pollet called it the premier meet in the country.

"There will be the top five fastest girls in the country in the 300," Pollet said. "She can't not go to this. Every college is looking at these results and they're going to be making scholarship offers based on what she does. She's had a good season so far and this is only the beginning."

A handful of Long Island club teams have participated in the Armory meets.

"It's really important because I don't know what I'd do without track," Huntington senior Anthony Joseph said. "I don't know what I'd be."

Wilson said the idea to run as a club team came after talking to college coaches and realizing the

need for some of his upperclassmen to post some faster times.

"Another reason to do it was just for the kid's psyche," Wilson said. "These kids are suffering and they are suffering terribly. Just getting them out there with some sense of normality, even though it's nowhere near normal, just having them trying to train and run with a light at the end of the tunnel, it gives them a glimpse of hope."

The Armory has made sure stringent safety measures are followed, Pollet and Wilson said. Athletes and coaches must wear a mask at all times, even when racing, and all walkways are one way. Athletes enter through the front doors and leave out the side doors on the other side of the facility. Athletes are allowed one chaperone to accompany them. No other fans are allowed in the building. This will be increased to two once the "traditional meets" begin, such as the Hispanic Games in January, said Jonathan Schindel, the co-president of the Armory Foundation.

"Every single aspect of this



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— Deborah Lowe on her running

was designed so there was no contact with any other person," Schindel said.

Tim Fulton, director of high school track and field and timing at the Armory, said it has run smoothly. "At this point, people just love the opportunity to be able to get out there and start doing things again," he said. "We've had almost no pushback from any of our procedures that have been put in place."

Fulton said the Armory has put a finish line on each side of the track. "So in something like the 200 meters, we'll start the kids on one side of the track in the odd-numbered lanes and on the other side in the [even lanes]," he said. "That allows us to run six kids at a time, but the kids are still on opposite lanes, so there's still that distance that helps with the social distance aspect."

Said Wilson: "God bless the Armory and all those involved in putting something like this together for these young people. And not only putting it together for the young people, but making it safe and doable."

"I think they're going above and beyond to keep not only the athletes safe but the coaches and anyone they're in contact with," Huntington senior Isaiah James said.

James, who ran in the 400 and 800 last weekend, said running with a mask is difficult but thinks it ultimately will benefit his fitness.

"I was feeling pains in my chest before I even felt it in my legs," James said. "It's rough. But although it's really hard, conditioning our body in that way is making us stronger athletes. That's how I try to think about it and stay positive."

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