

# YMCA running program puts family on track

**F**reddy Rivera is following in his father's footsteps ... literally.

The freshman at Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical High School is a runner who's

showing lots of promise. Track and cross-country is a proud Rivera family tradition. His father, also named Freddy, his mother and his two older brothers are all runners. And two younger sisters are following him.



Larry Libow, left, coach of the YMCA of Greater Springfield's Y-SPEED program, stands with Freddy Rivera and his sisters Faviola, left, and Kineysha.



CICILY CORBETT



SPEED track program. His three youngest children, Freddy, Kineysha and Faviola, are all on the team.

Y-SPEED is a winter track program which allows area high-schoolers to stay in training during the off-season. Harsh New England weather and lack of good outdoor facilities have traditionally made it difficult for these youth to remain competitive. Now Y-SPEED runners routinely compete with college athletes all over the Northeast.

Y-SPEED accepts a few younger runners if they are especially motivated. Kineysha is a 6th-grader at Forest Park Middle School, and Faviola is a 2nd-grader at Washington Elementary School.

Freddy Rivera Jr. went to Maine recently and took second place at a meet there. His performance qualified him for a meet in Reno, NV. He didn't place in Reno, but considered the trip worthwhile nonetheless.

"It was hard because I was running in snow and I wasn't used to it," said Rivera. "But it was good experience for me."

"I like being in Y-SPEED," he continued. "If I didn't play sports, I wouldn't have as many friends and I wouldn't know Coach Libow and Coach Morton. Coach Morton has a lot of friends - we see them at the meets. Also, I'm not on the street, not fighting or getting into drugs."

Freddy Rivera Sr. moved his family to Springfield from Puerto Rico in the summer of 2008.

"There is more opportunity for my family to learn English here, and there are lots of different programs for them, like Y-SPEED," he said. "My children were good students in Puerto Rico, and they are good students here - on the honor roll. Freddy is a good runner; he was two times champion in Puerto Rico. Kineysha was featured with her photo in a sports magazine in Puerto Rico. She's a good student and wants to be a vet. Now Favio-

la has started running - she's got talent, too.

"All my life I'm working for them," he finished.

Freddy Rivera's kids are trying hard not to let him down.

"School is the same as sports," says Freddy Jr. "When I'm in school, it's like I'm running for an A. I'm doing well in school - at times, I've gone down, but I talk to my teachers, find out what I'm doing wrong, and try to do better. I'm planning to go to college. If I try my best in sports, I have to try even better at school because that is what will make me something in life."

*The YMCA of Greater Springfield was founded in 1852 and is the second oldest YMCA in the USA. Some 30,000 members and program participants are served annually in Springfield, Wilbraham and eleven surrounding cities and towns.*

For more information on YMCA programs, call 739-6951 (Springfield Branch) or 596-2749 (Scantic Valley Branch). To visit [www.springfield.org](http://www.springfield.org)