

# Flat tire creates memorable road trip for girls track team

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The girls track team had an unscheduled stop on their way home from the Clarion Ledger Sports Award banquet May 22. The team bus had a flat tire that night on the return trip from Jackson.

“Well, I can speak for everyone and say that it was hot, overwhelming and depressing, but it was also ironic because right before we left, I was talking about how I wished I could spend more time with my team and how the seniors graduate Thursday and that I’m going to be sad when I leave them,” senior sprinter Niyah Odum said. “Right after I said that, that night the bus broke down and we ended up having to stay in the hotel spending more time than expected with each other like I asked.”

Sarah Claire Miller, a freshman distance runner, said in addition to her cell phone dying the worst part of the experience was being hungry so late with limited food choices and no transportation.

“We tried to get Dominos and Papa John’s, but they were closed so we eventually got Whataburger at 1:15 in the morning,” Miller said, adding that she was grateful for a stranger’s kindness. “Coach JJ (Downs) brought our food to us because the person at the front desk let us borrow his car.”

Miller said that while Downs took care of the hotel and meal arrangements, “They towed the bus somewhere last night and coach (Austin) Epting and coach (Bruce) Hall went with the tow truck people and I think they were trying to get a new tire on it.”

The coaches kept parents informed of the situation throughout the night and the next morning.

“Thank you for understanding,” Downs told parents in a Remind message. “The kids were awesome during this.”

The team bus arrived at Center Hill High School around 3:30 p.m. May 23, bringing an end to the adventure that included being recognized by the Clarion Ledger as the 5A state champs and seeing celebrity guests Mia Hamm and Nomar Garciaparra at the banquet.

As for the flat tire, “It was a memorable moment added to the rest of the memories I have with the track team that I will cherish forever,” Odum said.



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Junior sprinter Kyla Johnson exits the Center Hill track team's bus May 23, a day after a flat tire caused an unexpected detour when the team was returning from a banquet in Jackson.