

I met both James and Lea this past June when I took the assistant coach position with Ford Sayre. Since then, I have more than enjoyed getting to play a small role in their development as athletes and individuals, and I am incredibly proud to say a few things about each of them as this year's Mike Gallagher Award winners.

While both James and Lea are accomplished skiers with a long list of impressive race results, given that they are receiving this award, what has stood out to me more is the leadership roles that they have both stepped into on our team.

I'll start with James—he is the epitome of someone who leads by example. This fall, he came to me and our head Coach Hilary to discuss whether he should continue to practice and compete with his high school team in addition to Ford Sayre this winter. While we didn't give him an answer either way, I speak for both of us when I say that we were proud that he chose to continue to do both. James's presence on his high school team is a big reason why athletes including but not limited to Joey Sluka have made massive improvements to be where they are at today. The level of professionalism that he holds himself to and his calm sense of confidence is a grounding presence on our team. Because of this, we will be sure to miss when he is at Colby next year.

While James leads by example, Lea has taken it upon herself to willingly provide advice and mentorship to some of the younger athletes on our team. When I briefly met her at a race last winter, she was a bundle of nerves and for a lack of a better term a little bit of a wreck prerace. This year, I have observed Lea not only work through improving her own attitude towards racing but also empathetically offer her perspective to her peers. And the result of these interactions speak for themselves, with our U16 girls having a stellar season.

Beyond their obvious displays of talent, hard work, and leadership, James and Lea exude a love for the sport, so congratulations to both of you—Hilary, your teammates, and I cannot wait to see where skiing will continue to take you and the positive impact you will have on those that have the privilege to know you.