KELSEY SANTISTEBAN

In terms of long-distance running, the Kelsey Santisteban was at the head of her class at Castro Valley High.

But like many sports standouts, the view at the beginning of her athletic path didn’t look anything like it eventually became.

A soccer, basketball and softball player as a youth, as well as a dancer, Santisteban noticed something in P.E. at Jensen Ranch Elementary while doing an exercise most students despised -- the mile run.

“I was always at the head of the pack,” she said of the weekly coed endeavor. “I realized: I’m a pretty good runner.”

So Santisteban took to the hilly paths around Lake Chabot to get better. It didn’t take long for her to become the best.

Following in the footsteps of her older sister, Kaitlin, Santisteban joined the Castro Valley High cross country team as a freshman and never looked back.

After running with the pack that earned the Trojans a spot in the team competition at the State Meet her first three years, Santisteban made it on her own as a senior as the NCS champion.

Santisteban finished fifth in the 2010 State Meet, earning a trip to Portland for the nationals, a boost in confidence going into her senior track season and, eventually, a spot on Cal’s cross country team.

She set Castro Valley High records in the 1,600 meters (4:53.75) and 3,200 (10:35.53) that spring, and qualified for the State Meet in both.

Her cross country career at Cal mirrored her high school success. First, she made a trip to the NCAA Championships as the lone freshman on a junior- and senior-dominated team, before going solo to the 2013 nationals and earning All-American status by finishing 10th, the best ever for a Cal runner.

Santisteban is a Cal graduate in Integrative Biology who now works in the Kaiser Permanente Division of Research.