

Wisconsin Cross Country Coaches Association Official Newsletter

-Issue #1, Feb 2025



President's Message:

Hello, fellow cross country coaches! Welcome to the first installment of the WCCCA official newsletter. I'm Craig Olson, president of the association. I teach and coach at Menomonie High School, up in the northwoods. I'm honored to serve as the president of the WCCCA and I thought it would be fun to have a tri-yearly newsletter - one after the clinic, one before the season in August and one in November after the season is completed.

My plan with the newsletter is to focus on information regarding training, interview some coaches and parents about XC, discuss some of the on-goings regarding the WIAA and WCCCA and just have some fun highlighting the oddities of our awesome sport. Questions, concerns, corrections, comments, criticisms or inquiries should be sent to me at craig_olson@msd.k12.wi.us. All advice herein is 100% guaranteed to work every time or your money back (and since it's free, then that's what it's worth)! All words are mine, except when noted. We have some great guests this installment and hopefully you'll be entertained.

The theme for the Feb newsletter is 1980s action and comedy movie quotes. If you can name all 9 quotes, and the movies they come from, email me the answers, you'll get a prize. See the final section for details. For now, let's *light this candle!*

Racing Corner - I'll be back.

The Race to Watch this Newsletter is a track race, not XC, but it's a great race to illustrate the simple concepts of smart strategy and even pacing. The 1972 Olympics were pretty brutal. Most of us know, or remember, the history of that Olympics through two events - the disappointing and oddly inspiring 5k in which Steve Prefontaine finished fourth, and the sanguinary and awful hostage crisis involving Israeli athletes. But there was one terrific race that occurred, one that had been overshadowed by Pre and hostages and has since become a classic of smart strategy. That race is Dave Wottle's 800m, a masterwork of even pacing and "last to first" racing. [The link to the race is here](#). Apparently all four of his 200s were mid-26s, which is pretty spectacular. I always assumed this was by design - that Dave planned an even-paced race and that he hammered endless 26's in his workouts, to the point where it became automatic, and he trained that race again and again before running it. I was wrong, though. In interviews he has stated that he felt terrible prior to the race, started sluggish because he was tired and somehow found something deep down over the last 300m to finish with a win. Either way, I like the race because it shows how smart strategy can pay-off and it's a quick race to share with our runners to illustrate a simple point.

2025 WCCCA Clinic Recap - Welcome to the party, pal!

The 2025 WCCCA clinic was a tremendous success. There were 278 coaches who registered and attended, which set a new record for our association (previous record 260). We had some outstanding speakers, a surprisingly mild business meeting and we inducted seven individuals into the hall of fame. Our speakers were the following:

[Joe Bourland](#), boys (D2) and girls (D3) coach of the state champion Kholer squads, led off the clinic with a wonderful presentation. He discussed his journey as a researcher and executive in the corporate world and how he has applied a business approach to his cross country team. He also spent quite a bit of time on competitive balance with some great analysis on which teams win state, what lessons we've learned from the implementation of competitive balance and the problems that have arisen due to a lack of a reasonable appeal process.

[Lindsay Crevoiserat](#), women's coach at the University of Wisconsin, was our keynote speaker. *You want your athletes to show up everyday excited to be there. This sport is really hard.* Lindsay mentioned that success comes from a culture where everyone matters - a terrific sentiment for our awesome sport. She discussed the importance of a narrow spread for her team this year, the "power of the pack", and the resilience she's able to build in her athletes.

[Glen Gardiner](#), coach of the 2nd place D1 girls Wauwatosa East squad (and my new vice president), started us out on Saturday. *Most of us don't get to the mountain top, and none of us spend a lot of time there. But the view from half-way up the mountain is really nice, too.* Glen talked about all of us having teams at different parts of the journey. A long



career of coaching will see a program go through various cycles, but if a program focuses on improvement, consistency and has clear expectations it will be a positive experience for the athletes.

[Brandon Langer and Bob Fleichouse](#), coaches of the D3 state champion boys team of Cedar Grove/Belgium, discussed their program, dealing with expectations with injured athletes, the effects of competitive balance on a great D3 program and a training philosophy of consistency and leadership and culture. And the D2 and D3 boys state champions were from the same conference? That's a tough conference!

Leah Scalf, Licensed Athletic Trainer from Children's Hospital in Milwaukee, Crystal Toll, Physical Therapist, and Cynthia Dusel, Orthopedic Nurse Practitioner, all gave fabulous presentations regarding sports medicine and what they are seeing regarding deficiency in athletes. Some of the key points were awareness of [non-anemic iron deficiency](#) and the importance of advocating that athletes get significant iron treatment from doctors who will consider endurance runners in the "normal" range. Endurance athletes have abnormal iron demands, so a "normal" range is not sustainable. [We saw a great presentation on REDs](#) - Relative Energy Deficiency in Sports. The former view of these issues was the female athlete triad; menorrhea (absence of a menstrual period), disordered eating patterns and osteoporosis (low bone density). We now look at athletic health as a spectrum and also include male athlete health. Research has led sports medicine to redefine around concepts and diagnosis of low energy availability and impaired body functions.

BUSINESS MEETING

The business meeting was surprisingly uneventful. My very brief presentation on the next steps with competitive balance [is here](#). Remember, get those petitions signed, talk to your AD/Superintendent/Principal and have your opinion voiced at the WIAA April meeting. We also had some items brought back from Coaches Advisory (hats, watches, face paint/make-up).

There are a couple of structural changes with the association as well. We said goodbye to Bryon as our president. He steered the ship and is leaving the association far better than he found it. We owe him a huge thank you for all he's done to advance our association and sport. We also lost Andy as our VP - a terrific person who's also done a ton of work to keep the rankings, and the association, running smoothly. I'll spend some time in the next newsletter talking about our past presidents, some of the history of our association and what roles everyone has. For now, though, I'll try to transition to leadership in the association as best I can, with Bryon helping guide me, just as Matt Polzin, past president, helped him. Oh, and Glen Gardiner of Tosa East will take over as Vice President. He is extremely capable and organized, so we are lucky to have him.



Rules Corner - *I don't make things complicated; that's how they get, all by themselves.*

The Track and Field and Cross Country Rules Book from the NFHS has 10 rule sections. Rule Section 8 is just for cross country, the rest of the rules sections are for track. The cross country rules section is only eight pages long, with a page and a half dedicated to relatively outdated pictures of how to set up a finish chute (one diagram includes the term "receptacles for transponders"). Oh, and there is a sweet diagram of how to use flag signals to start a race, something that is almost never done at the high school level.

Anyway, most of the rules are pretty darn simple, but quite a few coaches and officials misunderstand them (perhaps being too distracted by those fancy diagrams). For example, a great many in our sport seem to think that runners must be no further away from a flag than 6', and that if a runner is further than 6' from a flag they risk being disqualified. This just isn't true. Not at all. It isn't. There is no rule that a runner must be no more than 6' away from a flag.

The rules stipulate that a red flag indicates a turn to the left and a yellow flag indicates a turn to the right. Blue flags indicate that the runner should continue straight. That's it. Six feet away? Nope, but your flags need to be AT LEAST six feet high. That's a rule, not a guideline. The rules also state that the starting area should be a line as long as the number of teams times six feet, which is just a stupid way of saying starting boxes should be six feet wide. Six feet wide starting boxes are a "should", not a "must", so it's a guideline for all meets, but it is a rule for Sectionals according to the WIAA tournament procedures for host schools. So, with flag height and starting box width, six feet does matter. But not for distance from a flag.

[Here is the primer](#) I wrote two years ago about course set-up. Remember, if kids are getting lost on your course, or are accidentally cutting flags, or don't know where to go - that's your fault. Proper course set-up is crucial to a well-functioning meet. So is knowing the rules.

College Corner - *There Can Be Only One* - With Derek Stanley, UW LaCrosse

Coach Stanley is the head cross country coach at UW LaCrosse for both men and women. He just finished his 13th season, and his career at LaCrosse has been absolutely phenomenal. His women's teams have won seven WIAC titles and have earned 79 all-WIAC 1st or 2nd team awards. His men's teams have won WIAC titles nine times, including a dominant victory in 2024. He's coached 80 men to all-WIAC 1st or 2nd team honors, along with 19 NCAA all-Americans. His men's teams have finished in the top 4 at the NCAA DIII meet seven times, including three runner-up finishes as well as a national title. This past season, UW LaCrosse absolutely dominated the NCAA DIII national meet, scoring 77 points and placing four men in the top 20 to defeat a powerful Wartburg squad by 97 points (meanwhile, the average margin of victory at the national meet this year in all other divisions, men and women, was only 20 points).

Coach Stanley is an outstanding resource for us high school coaches in Wisconsin. He's always willing to assist, answer questions and help in any way. I contacted Coach Stanley to ask a few questions for the Newsletter, specifically about recruiting, and he was gracious to answer. His words are in bold and italics. Coach Stanley can be reached at dstanley@uwlax.edu.



Q. Congratulations on the tremendous victory at Nationals. You've had some very strong teams over the past decade, but this national title must feel pretty good. What was it about this team that was so special?

This team is special because of the senior class from last year. Those men (and women) set a foundation that could be built upon. They stood strong, supporting others from underneath, pushing them to new heights. They were a selfless class, and we owe so much to them for paving a path for the current team to earn success. With that being said, these men are gifted and they work hard with a championship focus.

Q: La Crosse, due to its location, is in a unique position to recruit and visit athletes from Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. Yet 6 of your 7 runners on the national championship squad were from Wisconsin high schools. No other team that won a national title this year, in any division, had so many athletes from the same state. Is it intentional on your part to mostly recruit Wisconsin athletes?

Our goal is to keep the best Wisconsin runners in Wisconsin. Our primary focus will always be on quality recruits in our home state. However, as an institution of higher learning and growth, a diverse team will keep us our strongest. Therefore, we will continue to look for quality runners from other states as well.

Q: Most of the men on your nationals squad attended small, D2 or D3 Wisconsin high schools. This year, and even throughout your career, you've had quite a bit of success with runners from smaller high schools - guys like Ethan Gregg (Aquinas) and Isaac Wegner (Durand) who were terrific runners from small schools. To what do you attribute the success of runners from small high schools who develop into elite athletes in your program?

I have been recruiting for a while now. When I got to Wisconsin, there was a noticeable shift. Generally speaking, the upper Midwest recruits, including Wisconsin, have a strong sense of work ethic. They are grounded with the idea of putting in the work first before expecting the results. This obviously fits well with our sport. Another quality that shines is the humble nature of the recruits up here. I find this especially true for the small school recruits that I have worked with.

Q: Your men had some big victories at large meets such as Notre Dame and Indiana State, getting ahead of some very good DII and DI schools. I'd guess that the team you fielded this season was better than 95% of the DII schools and 70% of the DI schools in the country. And you did that without scholarships. Other than scholarship dollars, what are some of the challenges regarding recruiting at the DIII level?

One of the unique challenges we have is our limited roster size. We can keep a roster around 25 on the men's side and stay within our gender equity ratio for the institution. Good runners will choose a D1 or D2 option because they are guaranteed a roster spot. In our program, everyone must earn a roster spot. Moreover, the longer you are with the team, you are expected to show improvement to keep a roster spot.

Generally, for D3, the challenge is that D1 and D2 options overshadow the quality coaching and individualized approach to training that will make a high school runner successful at the next level.

Q: Do you have any advice for high school runners who are looking to continue running at the next level? What should a high school senior consider when choosing a college program?

When it comes to training, runners must listen to their body and quiet their mind. Thoughts driven by goals and expectations can lead a runner to make poor health decisions (running through sickness, pushing through injury, etc.). Keep the focus in the present. "What can I do today to make me a better runner for tomorrow." These day-to-day decisions, one session at a time, can lay a foundation for consistency. Consistency is the key to long-term development.

If you want to continue your running in college, there is a program for you. Keep your approach to college centered on your academic pursuits but research the running programs. Reach out to the coaches and inquire about the program. Fill out online questionnaires. There is a program to help you continue your running but make sure you would want to be at that college even if you don't have running as an option.

INTERLUDE #1 - Scholarships? I am serious. And don't call me Shirley.

Speaking of college, let's talk about scholarships, and the huge changes that are coming. For decades there were some simple rules with scholarships and the NCAA at the DI level. Scholarship limits were set and most sports didn't get nearly enough scholarship spots for a complete roster (with a couple of notable exceptions). For men, track teams could offer 12.6 scholarships while women had 18, and they had to share these scholarships with cross country. Cross country and track could divide scholarships and were *equivalency sports*. A handful of money-making sports could only give full scholarships, called *head-count sports*. As such, freshmen in track and XC were rarely given a "full ride." After all, a track and field program at the university level has a huge roster of highly specialized athletes whose events don't often overlap (the javelin guys rarely throw discus, the hurdlers don't often long-jump and the pole vaulters aren't on the 4x100). So a high quality freshman might get a .2 scholarship, or maybe a .5. After a year or two of high performance, growth and leadership by the athlete then the scholarship might increase. But a full ride for an unproven freshman at an elite university? You'd have to be one of the best high school athletes in the country and you'd have to find the perfect university that just happens to have a scholarship available. It's rare.

Also, just because the scholarship limit was 18 for women in track/XC, that doesn't mean every university would allocate all of their scholarships. Every college or university athletic department is, essentially, a business. They have to make tough decisions about the bottom line. So while a track/XC squad is technically allowed to give 18 scholarships to women, the athletic department at the university might limit that further to save some money.

Football is an outlier, with 85 full scholarships for a team, and all of those being "full" scholarships. There are some distinctions between FBS and FCS teams - distinctions that I don't really understand enough to get into, but clearly there is a lot of money available for football. Football is, of course, a major money-making endeavor for a large university, so it makes sense that they would have access to a bunch of money to recruit and retain players.

Everything got messy a few years ago with the US Supreme Court case *NCAA v. Alston*. Basically the Supreme Court rejected the notion that the NCAA isn't a "commercial enterprise" and sided with student athletes regarding the ability of



those athletes to make money off of sport. In our polarized political era this was even a unanimous decision by the court! There is a ton to this decision (antitrust laws, employee rights, defining what counts as compensation, the NCAA profiting immensely off of athletes, huge contracts for broadcasting, the idea that the NCAA is a member oriented organization that is non-profit, tax exempt status for athletes and a host of other things).

The floodgates have opened. We now know the term “transfer portal.” A lot of money is changing hands. Oh, and three new lawsuits were just settled under the case *House v. NCAA*. Basically, the NCAA will pay the Power Five (now four) conferences a settlement of \$2.75 billion to compensate former athletes for lost NIL opportunities, as well as allowing colleges in these conferences to drastically expand the money they can give athletes. But it’s all still in flux. Starting with the 2025-26 school year, scholarship limits will drastically change - far more scholarships are available (45 in track), but roster limits are now a real thing, and athletic departments will still have very broad leeway to determine how scholarships are allocated. There are over 30 NCAA D1 conferences. Do these new rules apply to only the Power Five (now four) conferences? Or do they apply to every NCAA D1 school? Can colleges opt out and still play by the old rules? Can some sports opt out, maintaining previous scholarship limits but having larger rosters? What happens to walk-ons, or is that not a thing anymore? How will Title IX and NIL correspond to ensure some equity? How will athletic departments tier their scholarships? Will this lead to more opportunities for track and XC or less? And how do our high school athletes, as recruits, try to navigate all of this?

As a side note, [many informed observers of our sport](#) seem to think these decisions are going to make it very difficult for XC and track in the future as more money is funnelled into revenue sports. But we’ll find out.

If you know more about this, or if I made an error, let me know and I’ll offer a correction next time, because this is complex stuff with potentially huge implications for our sport at the college and university level.

Training Corner - *I feel the need... the need for speed.* With Curt Kaczor, Arrowhead

How important is speed work for XC? My team doesn’t do much in the way of hard striders or sprints after practice. I found that my athletes were always getting hurt doing really fast stuff after a longer run, so I really scaled back our sprinting and strides. Then again, most coaches do some high quality sprinting during workouts, or after runs, or up hills, or barefoot on grass and turf, or whatever. I reached out to a coach who does quite a bit of sprinting to get an idea of how important speed training can be for XC. I asked Curt Kaczor, head girls coach at Arrowhead, about hard strides, sprint drills and running fast. Here’s his response:



Maybe it’s just my background as a short/middle distance runner, but I feel speed makes the runners more efficient. I mean, think about getting into shape. I run quite a bit. If I sprint or play basketball, I’m out of breath. I can recover, but that effort was extremely challenging even though it was short and I’m in shape. It’s like I’m missing something with just running, and no speed. I just feel stronger when I sprint vs when I just run.

I like the mental side of running fast. That is the goal. It’s hard to expect them to start hard or finish hard if I don’t expect them to do that on a regular basis in practice. After long runs we do flying 30s downhill. We work up to these by getting a bit faster as the season progresses. We’re always doing strides before the workout (100s and 200s) and sometimes ending the workout with “kick work” up to 200 meters. After normal runs we either do uphill strides; the length of the hill changes but we try to keep them on the short side, so they do 3-4 strides of various lengths. Pre-meet they finish with strides. I encourage them to use their spikes during the pre-meet sessions. I do skip some of the speed sessions from time to time and it probably ends up being 4-5 days a week if you count strides on race day. Occasionally the girls are pretty sore if we really do some quality sprinting. I might take two days off from sprinting after that and bring some back lightly on day 3. I’m sure there’s some lactic work being done on some of these sprints, especially the hills sprints on Tuesdays.

Lastly, when we do pre workout strides and hill sprints this is a good chance for me to work on race day stuff - strategy, how to approach a hill... things like that. I really think that stuff is important. Of course, we don’t run the hills in a race like we do with our sprints but we talk about our approach and simulate the idea, but with greater effort than that of a race. Or pre workout strides or post workout strides simulate the start and finish of races. Two areas that a lot of runners seem to have a lot of anxiety about. So this can help develop some routine that helps with anxiety.

Culture Corner - *Buck up, little camper. We'll climb this mountain together.* With Marty Bushland, McDonell

Coach Marty "The Moose" Bushland takes his athletes on a somewhat famous overnight camping trip the first week of practice. Marty is the head boys and girls coach at McDonell High School in Chippewa Falls. I asked Moosey about the cultural importance of an overnighter for team bonding and culture. Here are his responses.

Q. You have a great overnight campout with your athletes during the first week. When did you start doing this? Where do you go? How long do you stay?

If I recall correctly, we started doing the overnight trip about 20 years ago. One of my UWEC recruits followed me to McDonell and helped coach a couple of seasons and this was his idea, something his high school team in Minnesota did and we have been doing some form of it every season since. We have gone to a few different places in northern Wisconsin. We try to stay two nights if possible, but sometimes we have only been able to stay one night because of our numbers, costs, cabin availability, or conflicts with school. Getting away from masses of people is what we like best. We want the trip to be about getting to know each other/team bonding...not trying to bond with kids outside of our team at a waterpark or big resort.

Q. What are some of the fun, goofy things you do with your guys and gals on the campout that help foster your awesome team culture?



We typically have 20ish - 30ish kids/coaches/chaperones in total that attend Camp and divide into four teams. The older kids on the team are the Camp Captains and hopefully we have at least 1-2 juniors/seniors per camp team. They set up a draft and select their teams which often include our attending coaches and chaperones. Each group then collectively decides on a team color and team name that has to be approved by our coaches. The kids are then responsible for making a team uniform. Some years the kids will design/make their team uniforms before we leave, other years it is an activity at camp with stops at Walmart and Dollar Tree in Rice Lake on the way up to purchase items for team uniforms/team accessories. Typically I give each team \$20 and they hunt for bargains, and get creative/need to possibly work together with opposing camp teams to purchase body/face paint, tie dye kits, bubble paint, packs of t-shirts/muscle shirts, and look for team colors in hats, bandanas, sweat bands, spray paint, etc for their uniforms. Once the uniforms are finished we will have Opening

Ceremonies and allow the team captains to introduce their squads, followed by team photos before their uniforms get too dirty. We often bring our 8th graders and sometimes even younger runners if we have the space and feel they can comfortably contribute to a camp team. They probably don't know the older high school kids and vice versa, so we want a lot of saying/stating everyone's name as often as possible so we all know each other as quickly as possible at camp.

We then go into a tournament format for our activities. We have always had at least 10 competitions, and some years a few more with the additional ones often inside if we have heavy rain/storms. Our indoor activities are cross country trivia, team speed puzzle, team skits/lip sync battles. If we get two nights away we can often add additional outside activities like a horseshoe and/or corn hole tournament, a wiffle ball tournament, badminton air time relay, or badminton cross country. If it's hot, and we have the time, we will play water balloon volleyball, and/or have water balloon fights and squirt gun/soaker show downs. In addition to the sand volleyball tournament, our traditional events include a baseball relay, basketball round the world relay, egg toss relay for distance, football relay, Frisbee relay, greased banana relay, and in the water we have the greased watermelon relay, paddleless canoe races, and sink the canoe competitions.

Q. It's a lot of work to take a group of kids to a campground for a few days. What are some of the challenges you've had to address with the logistics of a camping trip?

Meal planning for everyone can be a nightmare. We do three meals a day and have had vegetarians, gluten-freers, and random other food allergies/concerns. The number of kids on meds was surprising to

me and keeping them on schedule is not easy when activities are fluid and often away from the cabin and more fun than staying on schedule with whatever is at 9:00/noon/5:00. Having all emergency contact info/allergy info for all attendees and a well stock first aid kit is a must. Knowing where the closest hospital/ER/urgent care is located. Knowing if there is good tap or well water suitable for drinking or having enough freezer/refrigerator space or closely available ice. You want to have fun with your kids, not make treks to the closest town to find needed items...so scouting out a site and preplanning is vitally important.

As for conduct at the camp, I put together a page of "mutual understandings" that I go over at our pre-season parent/athlete athletic code meeting with the kids and parents. On the back side it has the directions to wherever we go for that season's team Camp and the kids and parents hear that violating any of the mutual understandings can result in an athlete needing to call their parent(s)/guardian(s) to get picked up from camp and taken home, and possibly removed from the team. For many kids and parents this is their first impression of me as a coach and hopefully the only time, at least until the next athletic code meeting, that I'm seriously strict about something and we have been fortunate to only have had one issue (luckily it ended up being a non-issue, but could have been seriously disastrous). In today's incredibly litigious society, having clear cut rules/expectations is a must for any overnight trip.

Q. Do you recommend a camping trip to a new, young coach who's trying to add a cultural piece to their team? What should they know before they go into it?

Yes!! No!!! Maybe... It really is a lot of work, probably going to be expensive, next to impossible to pull off unless you have the right size team...obviously way harder the larger your team, you may need some/many good assistant coaches and/or parent chaperones. Or, do you include just your varsity/top JV? We are a very small school and I want all of our high school runners to attend but that has rarely ever happened and then those unable to attend miss out on so much...but with us I'm always about doing what we can for the greater good of the majority. You can accomplish so much when you are with your team for a full 24, or 48, or 60+ hours and learn so much about all of your athletes in that time frame, things you never see or realize when you only spend an hour or three at normal practices.

The Finish Line - *Hasta la vista, baby.*

That's all for this week. This newsletter has nine quotes from 80s action (and comedy) movies. Email me the quotes and the movies they come from. The first person to email me the correct answers receives a \$25 Kwik Trip gift card and all of their wildest dreams will come true.

If you have any ideas about what we can include in the newsletter, or things you would like to see, please let me know. Feedback is greatly appreciated. For now, though, enjoy the winter off-season and drop me an email or call if you have ideas, need help or have any questions.

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