

KELLY XC TEAM TRYING TO SURVIVE BUDGET CUTS

By DON SIKORSKI
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Budget cuts in recent years have challenged the longevity of many extra-curricular programs that are beneficial to the development of today's youth. Music programs, sports, and other after school activities are historically the first items eliminated when funds become limited. "Pay To Play" options have been implemented in some towns, often straining household budgets and forcing families to weight the importance of their children's participation in these types of activities. But thanks to Kelly Middle School Cross-Country coaches Jay Friedman, Tom Pirie, and Jodi Eaton, as well as the support of the Kelly parents, the program continues to flourish despite recent cutbacks.

Although economic times were good for years, recent budget cuts have challenged sports programs, especially at the junior high school level. Last year, budgeted funds for the cross-country program at Kelly were eliminated as a result of these cuts. Friedman, Pirie, and Eaton subsequently submitted a proposal to the Board of Education, offering to donate their time if necessary and promising to earn the required funds to cover the cost of the team's expenses through fundraising activities and voluntary donations from parents and friends. The Board listened, and the cross-country program lived on. "The parents were really great; we get a lot of support," explains Friedman of the Kelly team. "We kept the program going, thanks to a lot of fundraisers and the generosity of local businesses that contributed. And I was really lucky that the other cross-country coaches agreed to help out."

It would have been a real shame to see the cross-country program at Kelly Middle School disappear. The Junior High School team has over 80 runners competing this fall, incredible numbers that any high school program in the country would be envious of. Friedman, a teacher at Kelly for the past 28 years and himself a former member of the powerful NFA cross-country teams during the early 1970's, started the cross-country program at the Kelly Middle School back 15 years ago. Since that time, he and his coaching staff (which also included Sydney Pfeifer for the past 14 seasons until her retirement last season) have developed a strong tradition of distance running at Kelly. That tradition is one of the many reasons that the numbers are so impressive. Add to the fact that Pirie, as Kelly's Physical Education teacher, has a knack for spotting athletic talent and often encourages kids to give running a try. Another part of the appeal is that, as long as the grades stay up, everyone makes the team. Those factors, coupled with the fitness benefits that running delivers, is the beauty of the Kelly cross-country program.

The program has also benefited the Norwich Free Academy team, as many former Kelly runners have gone on to outstanding careers for the Wildcats. Runners like Marc and Jill Akus, Julian Callendar, and John-Paul Mandelburg were All-State athletes or state champions who got their start running on the Kelly team. This year's top runners at NFA, Zack Clark and Sterling Dumas, were both a part of the Kelly cross-country tradition. Kyle Friedman (Jay's nephew) has worked hard all summer as has been running with Clark at the Wildcats #2 runner this season. Dumas is a relative newcomer to running, having joined the Kelly team last season for the first time as an 8th grader and steadily progressed throughout the season. Christian Mulcahy, Friedman's top runner this season, has already won the first invitational race at Harkness State Park in Waterford. Friedman and his team competes in about a dozen meets per season, usually competing over distances of 1.7 to 2 miles. For practice, the team is usually split into three groups; beginner, intermediate, and experienced, based on each individual runner's level of fitness. The team is aiming for the State Middle School Championships at Manchester's Wickham Park, a race that the Kelly team has won twice. Even though his teams are competitive, Friedman understands his role of coaching distance runners at this age. "Our philosophy is that we hope the kids still enjoy the sport into high school," explains Friedman of his long-term goals for his young athletes.

Kevin Crowley, who coordinates a number of youth races and track programs in Norwich, is also a valuable commodity to the Kelly program (Callendar was a National Hershey Champion in the Mile while under Crowley's tutelage). "Kevin has been a great help over a long course of time," explains Friedman. "He comes to as many of our meets as possible and is always there to help out." The parents are also encouraged to attend practice and run with the team. "It's nice to see the kids out there exercising," says Friedman of the program's benefits. "And we hope to hook kids into the sport for the long-term."

The Kelly Junior High School cross-country team still needs help with funding if it is to continue. Anyone interested in supporting the team can send a financial contribution, made payable to Kelly Middle School, to The Kelly Middle School XC Program @ 25 Mahan Drive in Norwich, CT 06360 or call the school at (860) 823-4211 for more information.

Racing Roundup

The defending state champion Ledyard High School Boys XC Team is currently ranked #5 in the Northeast Region according to the latest poll by Harrier Magazine..... Former Griswold High School standout Abbey Sadowski is running in the #2 spot as a freshman for Boston University.....Irish Olympian Mark Carroll has withdrawn from this year's New York City Marathon due to a lingering hip injury. Carroll had finished sixth in 2:10:54 last year in his marathon debut.....The 16th Annual Harry "O" Fun Run, which took place last Sunday at it's new Mohegan Park location, was a huge success, thanks to the Norwich Recreation Department, Race Director Kevin Crowley, and a terrific Family Day event that followed. The City and everyone who volunteered their time should be commended for a job well done.....Speaking of youth running events, the 18th Annual Burger King Age Group Cross-Country Championship takes place on Monday, October 13th (Columbus Day) at Kelly Junior High School in Norwich. There are a total of 8 races ranging from 800 to 2,000 meters for children ages 6 through 14. Races begin at 11:00am, with trophies awarded to the top 3 boys and girls in each race and ribbon for every participant. Contact the Norwich Recreation Department for more information. Crowley and his staff (which always include Joe Lonardelli lending a hand with finish line duties) volunteer their time and always do a terrific job organizing the event, which has continued to grow each year.

This Month in History

September 2nd, 1985 – At the New Haven 20K, 68 degree temps and an overcast sky greet the runners as defending New Haven champion Bill Reifsnnyder and Jon Sinclair battle through 10 miles before Reifsnnyder pulls away for a 21 second win over Sinclair. Bill Rodgers duplicates his 3rd place finish from a year ago in 59:08, followed by New Haven course record holder Greg Meyer in 4th (1:00:22). In the women's race, Olympic bronze medalist Rosa Mota of Portugal hammers out a 1:05:38 winning effort, a full 3 minutes up on runner-up Diane Roger. CT's Agnus Ruane is 5th in 1:12:15. Reifsnnyder's winning time of 58:39 is behind only Herb Lindsay's 20K split in the 1981 Maple Leaf Half Marathon and Meyer's 1982 New Haven mark of 58:27, which was later found to be short. The 1985 course was later found to be 16 meters short, negating both efforts from the official record books.

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