

TRAILS

OLATHE EAST CROSS COUNTRY

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25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION!!!!

"A Special Year" Teams of Character

When Coach Gunn spoke to you on Tuesday before our park loops, I was surprised and disappointed. It hadn't occurred to me anyone would be cutting corners on the runs. I expect more of an East team and East runners, especially after your very fine performances at the Donut Run. Steve Prefontaine, a great American distance runner, said that giving anything less than your best is wasting your gift. He meant the gift of being a distance runner, of being a member of a high performing, high achieving team. You don't throw away a gift you value. A cross country team is a gift to value.

I was reading an interview with a coach this weekend. He said "we have lot of talent, so it will be a special year." I got to thinking about the years (all 25!) I've been hear at East. So many times, it isn't the talent that makes a team special.....it's the character of a team. Character is what you do when no one is there. Do you cut the corners? Do you run the whole route? Do you do what you can to recover from your workouts, or do you eat junk food, stay up late and ignore your studies? Do you support your team-mates and encourage them, or do you gripe about workouts, and undercut their efforts? If you are injured, do you do your rehab, or try to convince others they are hurt too, so you have company in the training room?

All of these are choices that you will face....teams of character will answer those questions the right way. And a team of character will feel good about their season at the end no matter what the scoreboard says. (and it will usually say good things, because doing the right things in cross country are usually rewarded).

Find out what you stand for. Decide what type of person you will be. My hope is that it is the type of person that will thrive with what we expect in cross country: Someone who gives their best effort all the time, someone who shows courage even (or even especially when) things are going well, someone who helps make the people around them better. Over the last twenty-five years, these are the type of people that have defined an East Cross Country team. No matter what their level of competition and achievement, varsity, future varsity (JV) or potential varsity (C team), you knew they would give their best effort: All the Time, All the Way. Join that tradition Hawks!

RULES OF THE PACK

When we talk about competing on the Olathe East cross country, about seeking our best together, that involves pack running. At East we have a long, long tradition of pack running. This is very intimidating to other teams we run against, when they see the Hawks warm up as a team, do drills a team, and start the race in a pack as a team. Our goal as a pack is to put ourselves in a position to win the team race no matter what race we are in, and to help ourselves to the best places and times we can get by mutually supporting each other. **Ideally, we want our #1 finisher to finish in as low a place as they can, then bring in our scoring 5 within 45 seconds and the whole pack of 7 within one minute.** Even in races where we have a wide range of abilities, there may not be one Hawk Pack, but MANY Hawk Packs. The philosophy stays the same. So here, Hawks, are the Rules of the PACK

- 1) **NO VISITORS ARE WELCOME IN THE HAWK PACK!** Run as close as possible, close enough to touch each other by reaching out. This is especially important through the first mile AND AT THE START. Don't be afraid to tell opposing runners to get out of our pack. (There is no rule against running in another team's pack, but often runners will simply be intimidated into falling back.)
- 2) **IN A RACE, NEVER SLOW DOWN OR HOLD BACK TO KEEP A TEAMMATE WITH YOU.** If you do, gradually the whole pack will slow down and fall back. That's recipe for disaster. If you feel good, keep going and bring the pack up to you!
- 3) **NEVER ALLOW A TEAMMATE TO FALL BACK WITHOUT ENCOURAGING THEM.** When things get tough, and you sense a teammate falling back, talk to them! Tell them to come back up. Tell them to keep up just a little longer: "10 seconds" or "Stay with me to the tree." Then pick another landmark. Sometimes a stronger runner can pull another runner through a race this way, and both have a great finish.
- 4) **WHEN YOU PASS A TEAMMATE, TELL THEM TO GO WITH YOU!** As a strong starter can sometimes pull a teammate through a race, those of you who come on strong at the end have the same responsibility to PUSH runners through a race as you come up on them. Tell them to stay with you for "10 seconds" or "to that tree". And keep encouraging them.
- 5) **HAVE A TEAM PLAN FOR THE START.** Know who's going to lead the pack out, and line up so we get a good start. Plan the pack. Know where you want to be at the first critical turn, bridge, or narrowing of the course. Having a group of runners with a plan for the first minute of a race is a HUGE advantage. Remember you seven second start.
- 6) **WARMUP WITH YOUR PACK.** The mentality and attitude of the pack starts when we begin to warmup and walk the course together. Get with your team and start to think like a pack! You can often predict how a team will race by watching them warmup and course walk. Does one kid hang off by themselves. Do they divide into cliques as they go? They will race the same way. We have a BIG team of Hawks. Use it to our advantage.

Cross Country Strategy: Blind Turns and Narrow Paths

A lot of people think that cross country is just going out and hammering at the race. Nothing could be further from the truth! Cross Country is a sport in which strategy and tactics can gain you advantages of 10 or 20 yards at a strike, and can make the difference in over 100 yards at the finish!! At the Lone Elm course there are a number of blind turns and narrow passages that you will have to use to your advantage.

When the Course Narrows:

At Lone Elm, as you walk/jog the course, notice where the course starts narrowing. In the first 200 yards, you go onto a path where only about two people can run abreast. In some places only one person can go on that trail at a time!

The main thing to remember about the course narrowing is: **GET TO THAT POINT FIRST!** That does not mean you need to make a break-neck sprint from the start, but a quick 7 count start, will often get you to the narrow point ahead of your opposition. Narrow sections tend to spread a race out into single file. You can often relax back to your original pace, and unless your competition picks it up, you will remain ahead. At the same time, if you find you did get caught behind, a quick pick-up after the point the course narrowed will bring you back. As you go into these areas, pick up the pace for about a five count (“1-2-3-4-5”) and then relax back to your original pace.

Blind Turns:

Another place to make up ground on a course is approaching and coming out of a “blind turn”, or a place where you go out of sight of your opponent. Most cross country runners in the last 2/3 of a race tend to settle into a pace, and run with the people in their pack. If you can get about 10 to 20 yards ahead of someone, often you’ll “break the pack” or get away from them. Blind turns work because if you pick up the pace around them, when the runner behind you comes around the turn, they suddenly see you twice as far ahead as you were before. **THIS IS ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE AT THE TOP OF A HILL. IF YOU LET GO DOWN THE HILL AND SPEED UP WHILE THE RUNNER BEHIND YOU IS STILL CLIMBING, YOU CAN TURN A 10 YARD ADVANTAGE INTO A LEAD OF HALF A FOOTBALL FIELD!!**