

Challenges Faced by Small School Track & Field Programs and Possible Solutions for Them

Scott Ball
Head Track & Field Coach
Westside Christian High School
Tigard, Oregon

Common Challenges

- Limited student participation
- Inadequate budget
- Facility and equipment limitations
- Coaching shortages
- Meet scheduling and competitive balance

Coaching Philosophy & Philosophy of Athletics

Russell Smalley - Westmont College

Athletics is not an end unto itself. Athletics is an opportunity for training and developing character in the unfolding story of an individual's life. I believe that Athletics can be a safe crucible of experiences for learning valuable life lessons. Coaching should be transformative for young people by fostering the development of trust, confidence, self respect and a sense of hope. A transformational coaching style is about relationships. It seeks to encourage, challenge and guide young people through a transitional time in their lives which positively influences their maturation through participation in Athletics.

Coaching Philosophy & Philosophy of Athletics

Russell Smalley - Westmont College

All willing students can participate on my teams, regardless of previous experience or ability. Athletic competition offers the opportunity to fulfill an innate human desire to learn whether one can be depended upon to perform to the best of one's ability under pressure. In this context, winning is best defined and reflected in each team member learning how to train and compete to the best of their ability. When this occurs, the athletic goal of winning contests can be attained in a positive and affirming manner. This is Athletics at its finest, whether in a dual meet or at a national championship.

Coaching Philosophy & Philosophy of Athletics

Russell Smalley - Westmont College

Athletic participation offers the opportunity for young people to experience a unique community that is bonded into a team by their shared goals, values and efforts. They can learn to give beyond themselves in support of the community. They also learn how to be trustworthy to themselves and to others as they recognize that everyone is working out who they are within themselves on a daily basis. I want them to learn to value personal relationships and to contribute to the team camaraderie by their own unique personalities. I want them to have a positive self-image that is not dependent on performance.

Common Challenges

- Limited student participation
- Inadequate budget
- Facility and equipment limitations
- Coaching shortages
- Meet scheduling and competitive balance

Challenge #1

Limited Student Participation

- Increasing number of Spring sports (& ECs)
- Student employment after school
- Athletes focusing on one sport - Not T & F!
- No athletes in some events
- May not have more than one athlete training for an event

Our Solutions

Limited Student Participation

- Create a welcoming team culture
- Make sure athletes have a positive experience so they bring friends next year – or even later in the season(?)
- Provide competitive coaching/meet experiences alongside “participation” mindset

Our Solutions

Limited Student Participation

- PE credit
- Develop event group culture
- Share athletes with other sports & Drama
- Create Traditions
- Flexible practice expectations
- Free branded apparel provide by a donor

Challenge #2

Limited Budget

- Limited funds for equipment and uniforms
- Meet entry limited due to transportation cost and escalating meet-entry costs
- Difficulty funding facility upgrades
- Expectation for coaches to perform fundraising activities

Our Solutions

Limited Budget

- Hand-me-downs from 2 public schools
- Donation requests from parents & alumni
(no ask for traditional fundraising)
- Families purchase uniforms (rule changes
w/shorts)
- Previously identified apparel donation

Challenge #3

Practice Facility

- No on-campus track (or limited access)
- Outdated or insufficient field equipment
- Shared facilities with other sports

Our Solutions

Practice Facility

- Rental of various tracks 1-2 times/week
- Maximize any space you have on campus

Practice Facility

“Track” Project - 2020



Practice Facility

“Track” Project - 2020



[WCHS Track Completion.mp4](#)

Challenge #4

Coaching Staff

- Limited number of coaches (\$ or otherwise)
- Coaches covering multiple event groups
- Difficulty finding event specialists

Our Solutions

Coaching Staff

- Tap into alumni still in the area
- Embrace parents who want to coach their kids
- Allow for less than full-time coaches

Challenge #5

Meet Scheduling & Competitiveness

- No league meets/limited meet availability
- Balancing # of meets for “JV” athletes with competitive opportunities for others (Entry limits)
- Competing (scoring) against larger programs

Challenge #5

Meet Scheduling & Competitiveness

- Increasing cost of meet entry
- Prohibitive costs of travel
- Meet hosting?

Our Solutions

Meet Scheduling & Competitiveness

Cultivate relationships with other coaches

Mix of “y’all come” and meets with entry limits

Rent nearby public school facility to host

De-emphasize team scoring

Focus on the individual and personal bests

Final Encouragement

- “Successful” programs focus on people over resources
- Work on your team culture and embrace each athlete who joins your program
- Low athlete to coach ratio is a positive
- Memories & Relationships – the only things we take with us into tomorrow