Coaching Middle School Track and Field

Coaching Philosophy

# 1 Having Fun – This is middle school track and field. A good portion of kids come out for track that have never run a step before in their lives. Winning is always nice, but having fun and improving is our # 1 priority.

Set goals. Some kids come out for the team to become better runners, experience track and field, get in shape for other sports, socializing or maybe their parents made them.

Goals can be anywhere from running 60 seconds in the 400 or being able to run two laps without stopping.

What can you do to make track and field fun?

Exhibition races before meets before the other teams arrive. We allow our runners to sign up for any sprint event (100, 200, 400, hurdles, relays) and field event (we usually offer 2 per meet). We run these like a regular meet and kids can compete for varsity or JV spots.

Relays are a great way to keep kids involved in practice or meets. While doing intervals if they are run in relay form can decrease the pressure to perform, and at the same time still get in an aerobic workout. In our exhibition meets we run 4 x 100 relays. This allows kids that are slower that don’t want to race and possibly be embarrassed and still be a part of the team / meet. We have relay teams that compete all season long trying to set PR’s that might otherwise lose interest.

Play games. Remember this is middle school. Every so often we will play sharks and minnows, angel / devil (cross country), or capture the flag (cross country). This can be a great way to still get in some aerobic work and have fun at the same time.

Optional practices. Many times we will hold optional practices on Friday or sometimes on a Saturday. We will even tell the kids what the workout is beforehand so they can make their decision whether or not to run. It’s usually some sort of interval workout with 200’s and 400’s or something challenging. The kids that show up are the runners that are serious about track and want to improve. This provides a great atmosphere to get in some good training.

Season Summary. At the end of the season we compile all sorts of data ranging from best times, most points, all time lists, meet performances, etc. We also send out e-mails throughout the season updating all the info. Kids can compare their times from race to race or in the case of our all time lists compare themselves to other runners. Many times we will have brothers and sisters come through the program and they can compare their performances.

Patience Patience Patience. Many kids aren’t familiar with how track meets work. From the order of events to the difference of what a distance runner vs. a sprinter runs. Be prepared to answer the same questions over and over. We like to put a sign that list the order of events or put it on the back of their team t-shirts.

Organizing a track team:

Among the coaching staff, determine strengths of each individual. Assign coaches to the following areas (depending on staff size): distance, sprints, hurdles, jumps, throws. Obviously with a limited number of coaches; each coach will need to cover more than one event.
We have also discovered that middle school students really love the novelty of some of the field events. We have large numbers that wish to only shot put or only high jump. This does cause an issue with numbers. Because safety dictates a need for small group instruction, we limit the number of athletes participating in a particular event. At the beginning of our season all interested athletes are provided the opportunity to receive basic instruction and a couple of days of practicing in all field events. We then hold a “try-out” for each event. Coaches keep the strongest candidates, but also look for potential out of younger athletes. The idea is to keep some younger athletes so experience can be built from one season to the next.

Advertise the team. Find those athletes in your building that can contribute to the team. Middle school students crave attention. Give it to them. Spark up conversation with those athletes that are key to your team. Let them know you’d be excited to coach them in track. Ask other staff members (especially those in P.E.) if they have anyone that stands out as an athlete. Find out who their friends are and get them excited about participating. Middle school students are a great group to work with. They have passion and are excited when the adults guiding them are passionate as well.

**Practice Routine:**

Our philosophy has been that every athlete can compete in either a distance or sprint event, so you can complete “running” workouts at one time. Then, athletes can break into their “specialty” events. With limited coaches this schedule may need to occur over multiple days. A possible suggestion could be do complete distance/sprint workouts daily followed by long jump and shot put on day one. Then, day two could have another distance/sprint workout followed by high jump and discus. Hurdles could potentially be covered as a part of the sprints workout every second day.

In programs with larger coaching staffs, field events could be covered each day. Our programs while separate in many ways, share coaches that have trained in the events they focus on. All athletes do train for a running event, but then break off for field events once those workouts have been completed. We have one throws coach that works with both boys and girls in shot put and discus. We also have one coach each focusing on long jump, high jump, and hurdles. We have found this to be a successful formula, and an excellent strategy in properly educating coaches so that athletes receive the best instruction for each event.

**Winter Training:**

At Clay we have organized a “Winter Warriors” club, and while it generally caters to cross country and distance runners, we have found that some sprinters and field athletes have an interest as well. The club meets two or three times a week for regular runs with an occasional threshold workout (tempos or fartleks) throw in. Athletes also compete in local road races. For some it provides a purpose for all the training at that time of year. The group is really a social interaction, and is great for building bonds among teammates. It is something that many athletes look forward to once the cross country season has ended.

**Cross Country:**

**The 400 Test:**