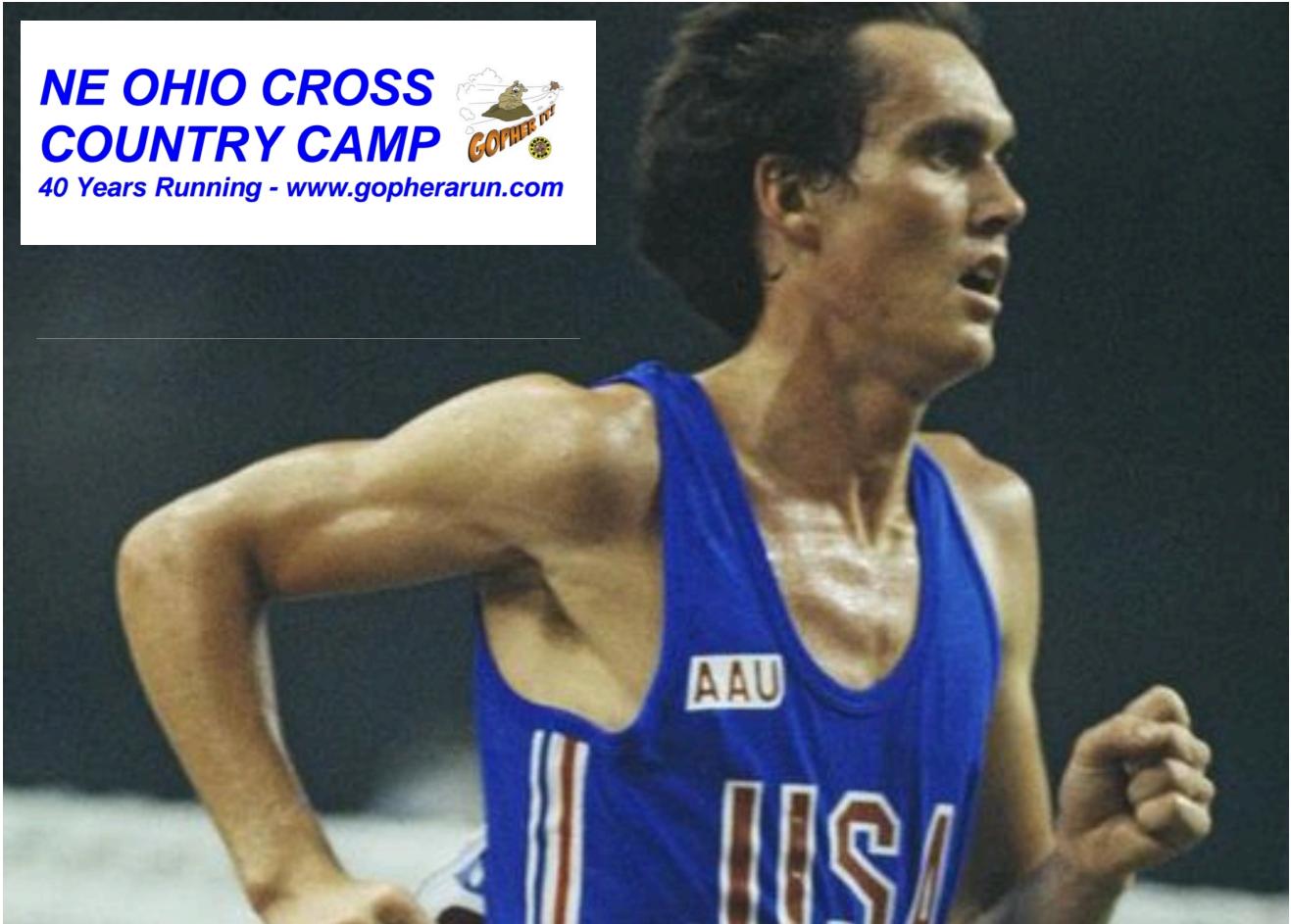

CRAIG VIRGIN

CROSS COUNTRY TIPS & INFORMATION

**NE OHIO CROSS
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40 Years Running - www.gopherarun.com



3-time U.S. Track & Field Olympian

2-time World Cross Country Champion

5 Halls of Fame

“if I only had one more day to run... I'd definitely choose cross country!”

~Craig Virgin

BIOGRAPHY OF CRAIG VIRGIN

Date of Birth August 2, 1955

Place of Birth Born in Belleville, Illinois.
Raised on a family farm near Lebanon, Illinois.

Education Graduated from Lebanon High School, 1973
Graduated from the University of Illinois, 1977

- Major: Radio/Television
- Minor: Marketing/Advertising

Continuing education at the Broadcast Center and Center of Contemporary Arts in St. Louis with focus on electronic journalism, acting for the camera, voice-over and video production.

Professional Career

- President and Founder of Front Runner Inc.
- A sports marketing consulting company specializing in running and fitness promotions
 - Public Relations consultant
 - Professional Spokesperson
 - Freelance Broadcaster
 - Professional Public Speaker
 - Special Event Coordinator

Has followed up an interest in Illinois public policy and leadership with campaigns for the Illinois State Senate (1992) and the St. Clair County Board (1998, 2002).



Athletic Career

Completed 23 years of competition in the three sports available in long distance running: cross country, track, and road racing. Rated national or world class for most of his career. Retired from serious competitive running in January of 1992. Craig has been running for over 40 years, and participates in other cross training activities like elliptical, biking, swimming and weight lifting for fitness. Still enjoys promoting both the sport and personal fitness.



Sports Achievements

- Elected into the U.S. Track & Field Hall of Fame, 2010
- Inducted into the U.S. Distance Running Hall of Fame, 2001
- 3-time U.S. Olympian in 10,000 meter event, 1976, 1980 and 1984
- 2-time World Cross Country Champion, 1980 and 1981
- 4-time U.S. Track & Field National Champion
- Former U.S. Record Holder at the 10,000 meter track event distance
- Former U.S. Record Holder at the 8K, 10K, and 10 mile road race distances
- NCAA and 9-time Big 10 Champion at the University of Illinois
- Former National H.S. Record Holder in the 2-mile track event
- 5-time Illinois H.S. State Champion in the 1-mile and 2-mile track events as well as in the 3-mile cross country race.

BIOGRAPHY, CONT.

Craig was inducted into the U.S. National Distance Running Hall of Fame based at Utica, NY in July 2001. He was a member of the fourth class of inductees and joined his early American running heroes Steve Prefontaine, Billy Mills, Frank Shorter and Bill Rodgers in the Hall of Fame. Recently has been elected into the U.S. National Track & Field Hall of Fame based in New York City.

Craig is a 3-time Olympian (1976, 1980, 1984) on the U.S. Track & Field Team in the 10,000 meter event. This accomplishment is unprecedented for an American born athlete in that event. He finished 2nd in the U.S. Olympic Trials in 1976, first in 1980 and second in 1984. He set the U.S. Olympic Trials record of 27:45.6 for that event in 1980. That record held for 24 years until it was broken in 2004. He ran the fastest 10,000 meter time (27:29.2) in the world during 1980, but was prevented from competing in the Moscow Olympics by the United States-led boycott. It was the biggest disappointment of Craig's running career. Craig had wanted to be the first American to win an Olympic medal in the 10,000 meter track event since Billy Mills' captured gold in 1964.

To date, Craig is the **first and only American man to win the I.A.A.F World Cross Country Championship**, winning in 1980 at Paris and again in 1981 at Madrid. He qualified for 10 U.S. World Cross Country Teams for this 12K (7.5 mile) international cross country race which is the only running world championship held yearly.

Craig is the former U.S. record holder at the 10,000 meter track distance (27:29.2) as well as the 10K (28:04), 8K (22:46), and 10 mile (46:30) road race events. Craig was the U.S. National Champion in the 10,000 meter track event in 1978, 1979, and 1982. He also set the U.S. National Track & Field Championships meet record of 27:39.4 for that event in 1979. It stood for 25 years until it was broken in the same race that broke the Olympic Trials record in 2004. The U.S. runner who broke it, Meb Keflezighi, went on to finish 2nd in the Olympic marathon later that summer.

Craig won many of the major U.S. sub-marathon road races such as the Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta, Bay to Breakers in San Francisco, Crescent City Classic in New Orleans, Falmouth Road Race on Cape Cod, Trevira Twosome in New York City, and the Maggie Valley Moonlight Road Race in North Carolina.

Craig ran only four marathons, but managed to win the 1979 Mission Bay Marathon in 2:14.46, at that time a world record for a marathon debut. He placed second at the Boston Marathon in 1981 with a time of 2:10.26, his marathon personal best. Knee and kidney problems curtailed his marathon training and racing after 1982.

Craig set the collegiate record of 27:59.4 for the 10,000 meter run in 1976 while competing for the University of Illinois Fighting Illini. He finished 2nd twice in the 10,000 meter event in the NCAA Track & Field Outdoor Championships in 1976 and 1977. He placed 2nd and 3rd in the indoor 2-mile and 3-mile runs, respectively, in the 1976 and 1977 NCAA Indoor Track & Field Championships. He was the first American finisher in 8 NCAA Championship races. Craig was a 10-time NCAA All-American in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track. He also was a 9-time Big Ten Champion in the same sports. In addition, he won 13 titles in the Illinois Intercollegiate Championships.

Craig was selected as Track & Field News prestigious National High School Athlete of the Year in 1973 on the basis of performances set at 1-mile (4:05.5), 3,000 meters (8:10.2), 2-mile (8:40.9), 3-mile (13:36.8) and 5,000 meters (13:58.2) events during his senior year of high school. Craig won the National AAU Junior 3-mile track championship in 1973 with a time of 13:36.8. He won five Illinois High School State Championships in cross country, as well as the 2-mile and 1-mile track events in 1972-1973. Craig still holds the IHSA State Cross Country Championships 3-mile course record of 13:50.6, as well as the State Track meet 2-mile event record of 8:42.6. His fastest high school 2-mile time of 8:40.9 broke Steve Prefontaine's national high school record. That performance still stands as the 2nd fastest time ever run in an all-high school athlete race.



MANAGEMENT/BOOKINGS

Karen Fox, *Marketing/Promotions*

877.861.4422

karen.fox@craigvirgin.com

Front Runner Inc.

T/618.792.9500 F/618.537.9555

P.O. Box 215 Lebanon, Illinois 62254

craigvirgin.com

CRAIG VIRGIN
HIGH SCHOOL RUNNING CAREER
 (Fall 1969 - Summer 1973)

Year	X-C Home Course	X-C State Meet	440 Yards	880 Yards	1 Mile	2 Mile	3 Mile	5,000 Meters
Freshman 1969 - 1970 Age 14	15:36 (2.75 mi.)	Did not qualify - 10 th @ Sectional	DNR	DNR	DNR	9:31.9	DNR	DNR
Sophomore 1970 - 1971 Age 15	13:59 (2.75 mi.)	6 th 13:04 (2.75 mi.)	DNR	2:01	Indoor - 4:24 Outdoor - 4:19	Indoor - 9:05.4 Outdoor - 8:57.3	DNR	DNR
Junior 1971 - 1972 Age 16	14:40 (2.95 mi.)	1 st 13:59.3 (3 mi.)	53 sec.	1:58.6	Indoor - 4:13 Outdoor - 4:09.2	Indoor - 8:54 Outdoor - 8:51.9	13:49.0	14:12.3
Senior 1972 - 1973 Age 17	14:08 (3 mi.)	1 st 13:50.6 (3 mi.)	52 sec.	1:56.8 1:53 (relay)	Indoor - 4:08 Outdoor - 4:05.5	Indoor - 8:45.6 Outdoor - 8:40.9**	Indoor - 13:49.0 Outdoor - 3:36.8	13:58.2

Note: Craig's birth date is August 2, 1955, which made him very young for his high school class.

High School Statistical Highlights

- 1 mile - 11x sub-4:15
- 1 mile - 7x sub-4:10
- 2 mile - 18x sub-9:00
- 2 mile - 5x sub-8:50

** Broke national high school record held by Steve Prefontaine

Note: DNR denotes 'Did Not Race' due to no official race/time for that year.



One would think that the so-called "running boom" in this country would have had a positive spin-off effect on cross-country. I personally don't think cross-country has yet felt the impact. Thousands of people are now jogging or even taking on fairly ambitious running programs. But most of them are taking to the streets and roads. They tend to avoid leaving the pavement for fear of uneven ground, hills or other inconvenience. Road races number in the hundreds; entrants number in the thousands. By contrast,

meets under all weather conditions. Club runners who succeed often are local heroes.

The American cross-country season is traditionally scheduled from September through November. This corresponds to the high school and college programs and fits into a favorable season weather-wise. The fall colors provide a panoramic setting with sometimes coolish temperature. Cross-country in the United States is almost synonymous with autumn; in Europe, cross-country tends to be scheduled from late November through the Inter-

ing. I feel that an aspiring cross-country runner must get at least six weeks of aerobic base training, ranging from 50 to 100 miles a week. This can be done at whatever pace feels comfortable, but at least one or two runs a week should be brisk to hard. The base training builds the runner to the point where real progress can be made through the utilization of fartlek, hill training and interval repetitions.

Strength can be built through continuation of distance runs from 8 to 15 miles in length. But to be race-ready, one has to

The American Cross-Country Experience

The Sport Captures Running in Its Purest Form, a Communion of Hard Effort and Natural Terrain

by Craig Virgin

there are only a handful of cross-country meets held in any large area, and most are limited to high school or college teams. Rarely does any cross-country race have over 200 entrants. Clearly, cross-country has not yet caught the attention of the masses, and that is unfortunate. Cross-country deserves better attention than it receives in the United States.

The sport of cross-country has always been regarded as track and field's poor cousin in our country. It has the reputation of the sport you went out for if you couldn't make the football or golf team. In its worst form, it is utilized as a mandatory fall conditioning program for high school basketball teams. In its best form, it is the running sport in which the team concept is best illustrated.

In Europe, the sport has been developed much further and is almost as popular as track and field. There are even cross-country clubs in Europe whose members just happen to compete in track or road races to prepare them for cross-country. Thousands of enthusiastic spectators come to European cross-country

national Championships in March, with races run in all weather conditions.

Most American cross-country courses are set on golf courses. The races stick to fast, short-cropped grass fairways, with a few token hills thrown in to give the courses some challenge. European cross-country tends to be much tougher, with courses usually set through woods or bottomland. Ankle-deep mud over much of the course is quite common, as are natural and man-made barriers. However, a few of the European championships are set in large steeplechase horse racing parks.

The most unique cross-country race I've ever run was in Milan, Italy, under the name of Cinque Mulini (five mills). The course required going through fields, paths, barn alleyways, barn lots, a water mill, with a finish in a stadium. Twenty to thirty thousand spectators lined the course.

In the United States I see very few people who really know how to run cross-country properly. There have always been a few runners who excel at cross-country. These are not second-rate runners, but ones who have developed certain skills or motivations that are conducive to cross-country. There are some runners who feel they don't want to compete in cross-country because they just aren't good at it. However, I believe that with the proper preparation and attitude, most distance runners can really enjoy and compete well in cross-country.

Being able to enjoy cross-country, like any other sport, requires the proper train-



balance the long runs with workouts of shorter duration but harder effort.

The first transition is to try fartlek one to three times a week. The fartlek would be from three to six miles in length. The surges should be faster than overdistance pace, but slow enough so that the assigned distance can be completed. The recovery segment should be slow enough and long enough to attain full recovery early in the season. Later, a shorter rest interval with a brisk-to-hard surge is necessary when "peaking" for a period of time. Fartlek



on hills to learn the proper technique. Uphill technique involves a shortened stride, higher knee lift, aggressive arm movement and a forward lean. Downhill technique involves a longer stride, lower knee lift and an ability to let oneself go naturally faster, just short of losing control. The stride length should shorten or lengthen smoothly as if it were driven by an automatic transmission.

Downhill running is a technique that requires the finesse and self-confidence that practice breeds. The length of the

workout should be long enough to allow the runner to run race pace and still have another gear left. This can be done through hard fartlek or through a traditional repetition workout. The reps could be anywhere from 220 yards to one mile, depending on the goal of the workout. The rest interval should vary with length of the repetitions and the athlete's physical condition. This workout really works the cardiovascular system and acquaints the leg muscles with a faster tempo.

By the middle of the season, a typical workout week should include a long run,

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ing but leads to the source of fun in the sport: *racing*. The cross-country race is the instrument by which to measure your progress. While there is no substitute for adequate training, there are a few helpful hints and techniques that may make success more probable.

The first is familiarization with the course. It is a good idea to walk over the course to discover what type of terrain it contains, and more importantly, where it falls in relation to the course's layout. This affects pace judgment early in the race and allows for some mental preparedness needed to ready oneself for a particularly demanding climb or jump. Familiarity with the course allows the person to fully concentrate on running to the best of his ability, and not having to waste energy wondering where to go next. Final-

ly, because a cross-country race usually is run from flag to flag, one should check the course ahead of time to see where distance can legally be shaved. Sometimes a curve can be straightened or a hard turn rounded to make the course a little shorter or a little easier. This can have a critical effect on your final place in the competition. It is one area that cannot be overlooked because your closest competitor may take the advantage.

At the start of a race, it is best to aim for positioning at the outside of the first turn. This will help prevent getting caught "jogging in place" on the inside when the field converges on the first turn. It could mean the difference of 10 seconds or 20 places in a large race.

The early pace should be set according to the athlete's appraisal of his own

abilities and the particular demands of the course topography. It is best for most people to be a little conservative in the beginning. However, if one entertains thoughts of a top-5 finish, it usually requires being up with the leaders right away, especially in a large field. Almost no one ever cracks the top 10 in a race unless he gets out in the first 25.

You should try to be in the position or place that you desire to finish by the midpoint of the race. It is my experience that most of the finish positions are set halfway through the race; on a demanding course, there is little passing over the last mile or two. That doesn't mean you needn't be aggressive at the end. It is just easier to be defensive rather than offensive when you are tiring rapidly.

The hills should be attacked vigorously,

but still leaving enough energy to get back to pace quickly at the top. Smoothness is the key. Remember the automatic transmission analogy. It is not necessarily best to be the fastest uphill or the fastest downhill runner. The one who can do *both* relatively well will usually do best in the end. Again, the key to hills is to have confidence, good technique, and be able to get back to pace right away at the top instead of slowing down drastically to recover from overexertion.

Because a cross-country course may be winding, the finish chute may sneak up on you before you know it. It is a good idea to set a landmark near the end where you think you ought to start your finishing kick. It helps to commit yourself to "changing gears" at the most strategic point according to your abilities. It is also

wise to hold your sprint all the way into the chute funnel—the finish line could be at the mouth or the neck of the chute. I've seen a lot of runners lose one to two places in the finish simply because they let up too early in the finish chute opening and were passed in the last two steps. This is especially important if you are racing in the middle of the pack where many runners are grouped closely together.

Although cross-country can be run on an individual basis, the most fun comes in participating in team competition. This could involve teams the size of five to nine members. Remember that although only a few of these runners will score, the remaining teammates will serve a useful purpose in pushing up other teams' scores. The importance of each member's role should therefore be stressed, regardless of

whether they actually score. A good team finish can help make the overall enjoyment of the individual finish even more satisfying.

Cross-country is my favorite running sport. It is my first love. Yes, given only one more day to run, I would easily prefer a cross-country race to a track meet or road race. Perhaps this is due to the fact that it was my first exposure to running during my freshman year in high school. More than likely, it is the basic simplicity and beauty of the sport that appeal to me. Cross-country is a very basic sport. In these days of emphasis on the "all-natural," cross-country is distance running in its purest form. It is an enjoyable and invigorating way to develop your running skills while learning to appreciate our natural surroundings. □

16 FEB 2017 SERIES



WORLD CROSS MEMORIES – CRAIG VIRGIN

Craig Virgin remains the only US athlete to win the men's senior race at the IAAF World Cross Country Championships. In the second part of our series where we've invited top athletes to recall their memories of competing at the World Cross, the 1980 and 1981 gold medalist reflects on his experiences in the event and explains why he would encourage any distance runner worth their salt to fully embrace the biennial competition.

EARLY ON, CROSS COUNTRY PROVES TO BE THE PERFECT MATCH

Perhaps it was Craig Virgin's rural background, but from the moment he first tried cross country as a high school freshman, he appeared perfectly suited to the challenge.

"I learned to love cross country because it was just like being on our family farm and running across the grassy pasture herding cattle," says Virgin, who triumphed on his cross-country debut as a 14-year-old.

A big success on the ultra-competitive Illinois high school cross country scene, he later proved a collegiate distance running star, memorably claiming victory at the 1975 NCAA Cross County Championships. The following year the 20-year-old showed his track prowess by qualifying and competing in the 10,000m at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal.



His indoor college commitments twice denied him the chance to compete for the US team at the World Cross Country Championships. However, following graduation and free from the constraints of a college team schedule, the rising US star was determined to seize the opportunity to compete at the 1978 World Cross Country Championships in Glasgow.

Exposed to “rain, snow, sleet and hail” all in the same race, Virgin finished sixth on his debut and was hooked.

“Racing in the World Cross Country Championships left a big impression on me,” he recalls. “I was intrigued by the reverence the race was given by the European media and sports fans. It was as big as the Kentucky Derby or Indy 500 back in America.”

He returned the next year for the event in Limerick, Ireland, but in torrential rain he slipped and fell in the mud early in the race. He recovered to finish 13th but was left frustrated by the experience because he felt he was in shape that year to claim a podium spot – a fact born out later that year when he smashed Steve Prefontaine’s US 10,000m record.

PATIENCE PAYS IN PARIS

For the 1980 edition staged at Longchamp racecourse in Paris, Virgin was determined to make amends for his disappointment in Ireland. Having matured both physically and mentally, he was

optimistic of a great showing, but it was the fair-haired Englishman Nick Rose who set a ferocious pace at the front.

On the fourth of five laps over the 12.5km course, Virgin had finally caught the lead pack and then set off in pursuit of Rose. He reduced Rose's 120-metre lead down to 20, only for the long-time leader to respond to the Virgin's looming threat with a powerful surge at the bell.

Virgin, however, refused to panic. Working in a pack with Belgium's 1977 world cross champion Leon Schots and German Hans-Jurgen Orthmann, they hit the final 600-metre straight rapidly eroding Rose's advantage.

The first significant move was made by Orthmann, the first to catch and pass the fading long-time leader with some 400 metres remaining. But Virgin wisely waited before unleashing his gold medal charge. He had practiced on the finishing straight many times during the week prior to the race and felt it to be deceptive.

"To win a big international race, you need at least two to three gear changes and my first came with 800 metres to go when I followed Orthmann, but did not quite match his ambitious pace. My second gear change then caught and passed Rose to move into second place with 200 metres remaining. Then, with about 100 metres to go, I found one last 'Hail Mary' gear and kicked again in pursuit of Orthmann."

Then, as the giant German looked to his left in an effort to recognise the danger, Virgin cleverly nipped in on Orthmann's blind side to sweep past the leader and sprint to victory by one second. It was a pulsating finale with the lead changing three times in the final 400 metres.

SUCCESSFUL TITLE DEFENCE IN MADRID

Devastated to miss out on the 1980 Moscow Olympics because of the US-led boycott, Virgin was determined to return the following year to defend his world cross crown in Madrid.

Facing a new threat from a crack Ethiopian team – led by Olympic 5000m and 10,000m champion Miruts Yifter – Virgin acknowledged the strength of the challenge.

However, he felt ready for all comers. "I had advanced since my victory in Paris," he says. "I felt near my Mt. Everest. My mental and physical strength was nearing an epoch."

From the outset, the Ethiopians were prominent and with two laps remaining the men in green and red "took off" with Virgin dropping off the pace halfway around the penultimate lap. Facing what he felt was certain defeat in defense of his title; he was given an unexpected and welcome reprieve as the leaders approached the start of the last lap.

"I saw the Ethiopians going off the side and heading for the finish line, even though there was still a lap to go," he recalls. "The officials started pulling ropes up and redirecting them on the course and, although I'm gassed, I'm starting to laugh because they were devastated and running about like confused chickens surprised by a fox."

Virgin took control of the race, although one Ethiopian, Olympic 10,000m bronze medalist Mohammed Kedir, sprinted and caught the American 600 metres into the final loop. Kedir launched his finishing drive, but having expended far too much energy in his earlier pursuit of Virgin, the defending champion picked off the Ethiopian with a late burst to claim a two-second win.

“I won more easily in Madrid than I did in Paris,” he said of this triumph, “and for me it proved my 1980 victory wasn’t a fluke and that I could have done a fair battle with the Ethiopians had I been allowed to compete at the Moscow Olympics.”



CROSS COUNTRY SOLID BASE FOR TRACK AND THE ROADS

Virgin believes without question that his training background for the World Cross Country Championships gave him the endurance to excel during the ensuing summer track season.

He also believes the event can serve as excellent preparation for a serious marathon bid in April or May and he would like to see more marathoners enter the fray. Virgin himself proved this by running a 2:10 marathon in Boston to place second to Japan’s Toshihiko Seko about one month after his World Cross triumph in Madrid.

“To finish in the top five at the World Cross today requires a combination of strength and speed,” he adds. “The marathon has gotten faster and the speed training for effective cross racing on grass translates well now to top marathon race pace on the road.”

Unfortunately, a kidney infection denied Virgin the chance to go for a hat-trick of World Cross victories at the 1982 edition in Rome. He went on to compete at a further five World Cross Country Championships, but never again came close to climbing the podium as an individual.

Yet beyond the individual benefits of competing at a World Cross, Virgin – who qualified for 12 US World Cross Country squads and competed nine times at the historic event – insists the team and developmental aspects of the event should not be underplayed.

“We trained together, we ate together, and even partied together, and it was always so sad when we had to leave to return home,” says Virgin, who featured on five silver-medal-winning teams. “We all came together as athletes with a mutual respect for one another and a shared team goal that bonded us together forever.”

Yet there is another overlooked benefit of the World Cross, according to Virgin, and that is the priceless knowledge and experience accrued by junior athletes when around their senior peers.

“For the junior athletes, personal exposure behind the scenes to the bigger name senior athletes acts as a catalyst for them to become more dedicated to their sport, set higher goals, and launch their career to another level.”

Steve Landells for the IAAF

Link to IAAF article: <https://www.iaaf.org/news/series/world-cross-country-craig-virgin-usa>

Craig Virgin Helps Guide Colorado HS to State Title

The Illinois running legend brought inspiration, information and training tips to practice

By Brian Metzler

As featured in the October 2010 issue of Running Times Magazine

Being a high school cross country coach can be a tough gig. You rely on a group of adolescents to log big summer mileage and then hope they have the work ethic and focus to adhere to your training through the competition season once school starts.



Bob Nicolls did that, plus he read respected training books and went to coaching clinics. But he also decided to take a slightly different approach four years ago when he agreed to help Denver's Regis Jesuit High School as the program's unpaid head boys cross country coach. A successful businessman and former high school runner, Nicolls, 52, wanted to help rebuild the school's dormant program so his sons, Danny and Bobby Nicolls, as well as their teammates, could maximize their budding talents as runners.

On a whim, he did a Google search for the biggest name he's ever known -- Craig Virgin — even though he'd never really met him.

When Nicolls was a prep runner in suburban Chicago in the mid-1970s, Virgin was an Illinois legend in his own time. As a senior, the record-breaking distance runner from the small downstate farm community of Lebanon ran away with the state cross country title in a still-standing 3-mile record of 13:50.7 and then sped to a national record 8:40.9 2-mile on the track the next spring. He went on to win an NCAA cross country title for the University of Illinois before becoming a top runner on the international level.

"I came from what I call the Neanderthal days of the '70s, where you'd run 120 miles every week in the summer and just burn everybody up," recalls Nicolls, a 1:54 half-miler who helped his high school finish second in the state in the 2-mile relay in 1976 but opted not to run in college. "So I was going to coaching forums and talking to different coaches and found if you talked to 10 people, you'd get 11 different ideas.

"And then I thought about hiring Craig as a consultant because I figured he was a guy who could help design a program to the point where I could get comfortable and get things going. It turned out to be much more than that. He looked at it as much more than a job. He took it very personally."

Since retiring from a long professional career that included two world cross country titles, three U.S. Olympic team berths, an American record at 10,000m and a runner-up finish in the Boston Marathon, Virgin, 55, has had his hand in many aspects of the sport -- including TV commentary, race promotion and motivational speaking -- but he'd done only a little bit of coaching.

Nicolls and Jesuit athletic director Kelly Doherty checked with the Colorado High School Activities Association to make sure such a consulting relationship wasn't violating any rules.

"I gave it some thought and told him I was willing to give it a try to see if it could work out," Virgin says. "If it didn't work out, I figured we could end the relationship after the season. But I was kind of excited about it."

LEGEND

Virgin brought his passion, experience, work ethic, credibility and a touch of panache to the Jesuit program, which grew from less than a dozen runners in 2006 to more than 40 last year. He visited with the team two or three times

every season -- usually during the summer, at a midseason meet and at the state meet weekend -- and made himself available by phone and email when he wasn't around.



Lukas Verzbicus, Craig Virgin, and Chris Derrick are the top 3 best in Illinois history in cross-country.

He helped lay the groundwork for the team's new training program, shared his war stories from international racing days, showed videos and taught the kids how to toughen up during intervals with self-inflicted mind games. During a summer training camp in Colorado with another school visiting from Illinois, Virgin helped pave the way for the kids to meet two-time Olympic marathon medalist Frank Shorter and University of Colorado coach Mark Wetmore.

The kids responded, big-time. In the first three years with Virgin as a consulting coach, Regis Jesuit recorded seventh-, fourth- and second-

place finishes in Colorado's state cross country meet. Then last fall, the Raiders finally won state as Danny finished third among individuals and fellow senior Brian Sokas was 10th.

For Virgin, who battled a variety of issues after retiring from his pro career, including nearly dying in a car accident in 1997 and getting divorced, it was a huge shot in the arm.

"I don't take credit for the program's success," Virgin says. "Bob's a very smart guy and did his homework and implemented changes. I just helped lay out the foundation and helped create a change in attitude that would help the kids think like champions and be willing to make the necessary sacrifices."

Danny and Bobby Nicolls soaked up as much of Virgin's coaching, knowledge and experience as possible and parlayed it into stand-out prep careers. Bobby had three top-six finishes at the state cross country meet, plus an 18th-place finish at the Foot Locker national meet, a state runner-up finish in the 3200m on the track and a victory in the 3200m at the 2008 Midwest Distance Gala. This past year, he was a top-seven runner for the University of Oklahoma, helped the Sooners finish 12th at the NCAA cross country championships and ran a 14:12 5,000m on the track.

Danny will join his older brother at Oklahoma this fall with a high school race resume that includes a third-place finish at last fall's state cross country meet, a 26th-place effort at the Foot Locker and a second at the Locker and a second at the Foot Locker and a second at the state track meet (and fourth at the Midwest Gala) in the 3200m. Under the guidance of 43-year head coach Rod Card, the Raiders wound up third in state in track last spring, the highest finish in school history. (The meet was held at Jefferson County Stadium in suburban Denver, where Virgin ran in his first AAU Junior National Track & Field Championships in 1972 and qualified for his first national team.)

Virgin's role with Jesuit won't continue this fall now that Nicolls is transitioning assistant coach Adam Columbo into the head coaching role. But the experience has whet the legend's appetite to continue coaching. He wound up also working as a consultant to one of Nicolls' former high school teammates, Bob Schafer, who is a volunteer assistant at a high school in Ocala, Fla. With Virgin's help, both teams improved last year, and the girls team qualified for the state championships.

"My approach is all about training the mind as well as the body," says Virgin, who is working on his autobiography and hoping to do more TV commentary in the next two years leading up to the 2012 Olympics. "It's about trying to create an attitude, but also teaching them. This is not rocket science. I want to train coaches to be educators and motivators and to be committed. If the coaches are committed to being a champion, the kids will follow."

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**CRAIG VIRGIN'S
TEN TOP TIPS
FOR CROSS COUNTRY SUCCESS**

- 1) Establish and confirm both individual and team goals with your coach before the season even starts.
- 2) Maintain strong, consistent training with gradual and measured improvement. Blend both speed and endurance work all season long; proportions to change as season progresses.
- 3) Train on both hills and flat terrain. Do most, (if not all) interval training on grass.
- 4) Run negative splits in training to develop better form, increase efficiency, and promote mental as well as physical toughness.
- 5) Visualize your top competition during workouts; run the last interval like the end of a race.
- 6) Scout the race course ahead of time to ensure the shortest possible route and fine-tune your race strategy.
- 7) Run both the uphills and downhills aggressively within the race.
- 8) Run your pace not theirs. Record and study your splits; planned vs. actual. Establish the first half goal pace early in season; work on bringing along the 2nd half race pace as the season goes on and your strength/endurance improves.
- 9) Learn to attack the finish whether you're in a battle or not. Don't ease up until you're past the finish line.
- 10) Establish pride and tradition in your sport of cross country at your school. Recruit more good student-athletes to join you to make your team's performance better.

The Critic

**It is not the critic, who counts,
not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled
or how the doer of deeds might have done them better.**

**The credit belongs to the
one who is actually in the arena,
whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood;
who strives valiantly;
who errs and comes short again and again;
who knows the great enthusiasms
the great devotions,
and spend himself in a worthy cause;
who, if he wins,
knows the triumphs of high achievement;
and who, if he fails,
at least fails while daring greatly,
so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid
souls who know neither victory nor defeat.**

- Theodore Roosevelt

QUOTES TO REMEMBER

1. CHOICE, NOT CHANCE, WILL MOST LIKELY DETERMINE YOUR DESTINY!
2. FAILURE IS NOT THE WORST THING IN THE WORLD;
THE VERY WORST IS NOT TO TRY!
3. WHETHER YOU THINK YOU CAN;
OR THINK YOU CAN'T;
YOU'R PROBABLY RIGHT!
4. BEFORE YOU CAN WIN THE RACE....
YOU HAVE TO NOT GIVE UP!
5. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE POSSIBLE
AND THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE
LIES IN A PERSON'S DETERMINATION!
6. THE QUALITY OF A PERSON'S LIFE
IS IN DIRECT PROPORTION
TO THEIR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE;
REGARDLESS OF THEIR CHOSEN FIELD OF ENDEAVOR.
7. YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE A WINNER.
IT IS A DECISION AND A CHOICE.
WINNERS ARE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE
AND GO THE EXTRA MILE. FINALLY,
WINNING CAN BECOME A HABIT
AND A WAY OF LIFE.