

A Team for the Ages

Now Part of the EHS Hall of Fame

By **RICHARD BYRD**
of the Journal



EPHRATA
— Ephrata High School's 1984-girls cross country team is one of the most dominant teams in school history.

Consider this. Not only did the squad

capture the first cross country state championship in school history, but they did it in an all-around dominant fashion, setting the third highest all-time margin of victory — 62 points — for 1A schools at the state championship meet.

That isn't even mentioning the fact that the seven girls on the team who went to state — Brandi (Evans) Faith (2nd), Brenda (Donehower) Fitzgerald (6th), Denise Whallon (14th), Julie Flint (21st), Chandra (McManus) Allen (34th), Darla (Donehower) McMillan (55th) and Cyndi (Carpenter) Brent (68th) — finished in the top 70 overall.

The thing about the 1984 season is that there really wasn't an indicator in 1983 that it would happen. Head coach Don McFarland started the boys cross country program at EHS in 1971, but the girls program didn't get up and going until around 1975. There were only two girls on the team that first season and McFarland said it took a few years to get the program going.

“So, 1984 was really the culmination of building a program,” McFarland remarked. “I knew we were going to be a lot better (than in 1983), but I didn't know we were going to be that good.”

There is one person that gets mentioned more than anyone else with regard to the success of the 1984 squad and the building of the program. That person goes by the name of Joe McManus. McManus' influence on the 1984 team was instrumental in the squad blazing through the season and hoisting the championship trophy.

Through intense workouts, one-on-one coaching and an intimate knowledge of the sport, McManus passed his love and passion for distance running onto a new generation of runners.

“Some of the kids from the 1984 team trained with Joe, not all of them, but some of them did. So, when 1984 rolled around we had these little tiny girls, most

of them freshman, who were really good,” McFarland remarked.

Much like it still is today, the local running community was tight-knit back then and McFarland and assistant coach Ed Hamlett knew their crop of freshmen were coming into the 1984 season well-prepared due to their training under McManus.

“We knew we had those kids coming in and they looked like they were going to be pretty good. There was some anticipation, but they turned out to be better than we expected,” Hamlett said with a laugh.

Almost 40 years have passed since that magical season, but McManus' influence on the 1984 team and season is still something that the members of the team can go on and on talking about.

“Joe would spend hours with us and then take us to all these different places to run and compete. We were working as a team,” said Brenda (Donehower) Fitzgerald. “A lot of people wonder how running could be a team effort. The team is very individual. You are running on your own. How do you help your teammates? Joe would tell us how and show us how we could help our teammates.”

“He taught us to work as a team and that is why the 1984 team was so awesome; because everybody was so close,” she continued.

McManus has nothing but superlatives to say about that 1984 team. He can still recall times from meets and —being the local running historian that he is — considers the 1984 team to be the most talented in the history of the school.

“The freshman and sophomore girls were probably the most talented on the team, but the whole team, from freshman to seniors, I would say were definitely the strongest that Ephrata has seen,” he said.

Sure, the talent was there. As was the desire to win. Those traits are no good however without a positive team environment/culture that is based on team results, opposed to the results of a handful of the top runners on the team. That is where McFarland and Hamlett really put in a lot of work. Everybody on the team had a specific role, with no one team member's role being more important than another's.

“We were a tight team of runners and everybody knew their position, role and value. We were supported as well. McFarland would take us like 10 miles outside of town and drop us and we would have to run back to town,” Denise Whallon recalled with a laugh. “If there were slower girls we would step-up and would slow down and run with someone who needed a companion. So, it was a really good team that way. Everybody took care of everybody.”

Nobody on the team personified that everybody takes care of everybody mentality more than Cyndi Carpenter. Carpenter — who passed away in 2014 — was the lone senior on the 1984 team and provided the squad with much needed leadership.

“She was in my opinion a very big part of that team. She kept Denise Whallon, Julie Flint — the other upperclassmen — grounded. There wasn’t animosity amongst the older kids with these incoming freshmen and she was a big reason behind that,” said McManus.

Born out of the team’s togetherness was an intense sense of competition as well. McFarland and Hamlett said before the 1984 season one of the things that stuck out to them about the team is just how competitive the girls would get with just about anything.

“Boy were they competitive,” McFarland remarked. “I mean they were competitive with one another too. They would race to the drinking fountain. It was pretty amazing.”

With talent, a sense of togetherness and a competitive drive to win, the 1984 team did just that. Week after week the sports section of the Grant County Journal featured stories of the team’s brilliance.

With the strong one, two-punch of Evans and Brenda Donehower leading the way, the Lady Tigers made a lot of noise in the regular/ post seasons and marched into the state championship meet on a wave of momentum. Mother Nature wasn’t about to let things come easy however. State was held at Hangman Valley Golf Course in Spokane that year and the conditions on the day of the meet were less than ideal.

“It had snowed and rained and was cold. There was snow on the ground,” McFarland recalled. “Oh, it was so bad.”

“We were in spikes. We weren’t even running in comfortable running shoes! We were in track spikes,” Whallon added. “We needed them because it was so treacherous!”

As a coach, McFarland was nervous the morning of the meet because of the conditions. The team was nervous too, but for other reasons. Hamlett said after the race was over the team didn’t want to hear any speculation about winning, as they didn’t want to jinx things.

“They didn’t want to get their hopes up. Of course we all knew watching the meet that it was obvious we had won. But we kept our mouths shut and waited for the results,” Hamlett said.

The state meet is a whole different beast with regard to the level of competition. As a freshman, Chandra (McManus) Allen said she was “scared to death,” but that togetherness of the 1984 team put a lot of her nerves at ease.

“I just remember Brandi and Brenda and I being in the middle and we had Darla and Cyndi and Denise, the older gals, on the outside protecting us little ones,” she said.

Finishing 14th on the day, Whallon said she came into state with one goal above all else; beating Cashmere’s Felicity Saberhagen.

“I still remember her name. We just went back and forth in races all year. So (beating her) was my one goal at state and I did,” she said with a laugh. “What I remember is passing her and I think my brain just shut off after that.”

The personalities. The dominance. The friendships formed. There are a lot of things that stick out about the 1984 team and season. Across the board one of the things that team members and coaches remember above all else is just how fun it all was.

McFarland put it best when he said, “we just had no issues.”