

From State Champion to Accomplished Coach

By **RICHARD BYRD**
of the Journal

EPHRATA — Greg Metcalf very well might be one of the most accomplished athletes to have ever walked the halls at Ephrata High School.



A 1987 state cross country champion and top 10 finisher at state during his four years at the school, Metcalf's run — pun intended — at EHS ranks up there near the top of the list of athletes who have dawned the Tiger orange and black.

Metcalf's post high school graduation life is even more impressive. All-American distance runner at the University of Washington, head cross country coach and assistant track coach at Auburn University, head track and cross-country coach at the University of Washington and finally — the position he holds today — men's distance coach at the University of Texas.

Few can boast that sort of a resume.

Metcalf has seen a lot, been to a lot of different places and interacted with countless people, but the one thing that has remained consistent in his life is the solid base he built in Ephrata.

The lessons the 2022 EHS Hall of Fame inductee learned as a Tiger were countless and are things that influence his life and coaching philosophy to this very day.

“All these wonderful people that I have been around, there are little pieces I took from each of them and made them my own and put my own slant on it. It helped create and shape the vision I have of what coaching is,” Metcalf explained.

Metcalf was actually born in Ellensburg, but moved to Ephrata at the age of two. As a youngster Metcalf played a lot of backyard wiffle ball with his dad, but he says he didn't really get into distance running until the late 1970s after he was introduced to it by his dad.

“My dad and (Ephrata local) Joe McManus met each other and my dad got into distance running. My dad wished that he would have run high school cross country and track at West Bremerton High School, but he just didn't do that,” Metcalf said. “Sports were something I did all the time. Like most kids in Ephrata, I grew up playing wiffle ball and playing up at Columbia Ridge on the grass fields.”

Metcalf played other sports like baseball and basketball, but cross country and track were where his skills truly lied. Those other sports refined his body and developed other important skills however.

One of the most important things he says he learned as a middle schooler was the concept of hard work, which was instilled to him by coaches of the time like Marty O'Brien.

“We had this conditioning program with coach O'Brien and when we lifted weights and played basketball five-days a week as middle school kids, it instilled a sense of work ethic and competitiveness,” he said.

He won some races in middle school and entered Ephrata High School in 1984 as a 4-foot-9-inch freshman. That year Metcalf

was a part of a group of five freshman boys who made coach Don McFarland's varsity cross country team.

As an accomplished coach himself all these years later, Metcalf can appreciate how McFarland went about coaching that young and raw, but immensely talented, 1984 group of harriers.

“I think coaching is about realizing what you have and then taking all the necessary means to educate yourself and surround yourself with the right people. Coach McFarland was so good at that and we were very fortunate to have him,” he remarked.

With people like McFarland, assistant cross country coach Ed Hamlett and McManus in his corner, Metcalf had the support he needed to go far and possessed the talent and determination to get him there.

He was an individual state champion in 1987 as a senior, finished in the top 10 at state four straight years and was a member of the 1987 team that took first at state. With his stock rising, colleges started sniffing around Metcalf his senior year.



His plan was to go to the UW, but that changed after he received a questionnaire in the mail from Central Oregon Community College in Bend, Ore.

“I think my dad made me fill it out. So, my dad and I went and visited and they were just starting a brand-new program. Honestly, for my career, it was the very best decision I probably have made,” he explained. “We won a national championship there in cross country and I was a two-time All-American. I went through some growing pains there that were great to experience.”

Under Central Oregon head coach Michael Dilley — whom Metcalf calls a “genius” and “mad scientist” — the young Metcalf found another coach who saw his potential and pushed him to be great.

The funny thing is that after his sophomore year in Oregon, Metcalf got recruited by all the big schools — like the Universities of Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, and Texas, Auburn, Washington State University and Clemson.

Metcalf just couldn't shake the image of wearing that purple and gold they dawn over there at the University of Washington however and he signed-on to run for the Huskies. Metcalf was a four-time Academic All-Pac-10 honoree as a Huskie and garnered All-American honors at the 1992 and 1993 NCAA Championships.

Post-graduation, Metcalf left Seattle to attend graduate school at Auburn University in Alabama, where he was a volunteer assistant with the track and cross-country teams. He was a steeple finalist in the 1996 U.S. Olympic Trials and around that same time Auburn XC/track head coach Kelly Sullivan left Auburn to coach at Willamette University in Oregon.

“Auburn offered me the job. So, at 25-years-old I am the head cross country coach and assistant track coach at Auburn University and I had never really coached anybody before,” he joked.

In his short time at the Southeastern Conference school, Metcalf coached his athletes to four All-American awards and seven berths in the NCAA Championships. He also led the Tiger men to a second-place finish in the 1997 NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships.

It was shortly after the second-place finish that Metcalf received the call that he had been hoping for and he accepted a job as head cross country coach/assistant track coach at the University of Washington in the fall of 1997. With five years under his belt as an assistant coach, Metcalf was named Washington's 12th head track and field coach Aug. 13, 2002.

“So now I am 32 years old at this point and I am the youngest Division I head track coach in America — until a couple months later when Chris Huffins got hired at the University of California,” he said.

Over the course of his 20-year run at Washington, Metcalf's distance runners combined to win 130 All-American Awards and 22 Pac-12 titles. He was named the Pac-12 Men's Track Coach of the Year in 2016 following the Huskies taking second at the Pac-12 Championships — the best finish for the school since 1976.

In cross country, Metcalf led Washington's women's team to a national title in 2008 and led both the men's and women's cross-country programs to top-10 finishes at the NCAA Championships in 2015.

Metcalf left the school in 2018 and spent a couple years working for Benyon Sports as an NCAA account manager. This summer the University of Texas came calling and Metcalf accepted a position as men's distance coach for the Longhorns in August.

At the Texas campus in Austin Metcalf is surrounded by reminders of athletic excellence at every turn. That sort of winning culture resonates with Metcalf due to him going to school during a time of unprecedented success for Ephrata athletics in the 1980s.

The success of his fellow Tigers pushed him to be better, which is something that repeated itself at each of his coaching stops.

“Success is contagious. When you watch other people do it, you want to do it yourself,” he remarked. “Success breeds success and for a long time that was what was going on in little old Ephrata, Washington.”