



Jason Miller - Rockwood Summit HS
millerjason@rsdmo.org

TEAM FIRST:

**Cultivating Character & Community
Through XC at Rockwood Summit**

(just a few of the) **MISTAKES I'VE MADE:**

“We have great kids, the culture part takes care of itself.”

- Have to CONSTANTLY attend to it. Build, adapt, adjust, grow, add, subtract.

Tried to do too much all at once.

- Play the long game, both training and culture-wise. Keep learning.

Compare our program to someone else's.

- Take the best parts, make it our own. Thief of joy kind of thing.

Best runner makes the best captain.

- Let them be the best runner, that's a hard thing in itself. Include everyone.

OUR SPORTS ARE DIFFICULT.

(Shall we count the ways?)

They're also TRANSFORMATIVE.

We want to:

- Be inclusive
- Create confidence
- Prepare them to lead
- Teach

**WHAT WE DO MATTERS,
A LOT.**

REALIZATIONS:

- **WE ARE COACHING A TEAM SPORT**
- **IT'S ABOUT COMMUNITY**
- **IT'S ABOUT BUILDING GOOD HUMANS**

I stand by this: ***winning is secondary.***

In fact, winning can only happen if we've created the environment in which athletes have a community that they care about.

Guess what: we WIN if they graduate and can say they had fun, they learned something, they go off and be good people, contribute, etc.

TEAM CULTURE HAS TO BE INTENTIONAL.

FUNDAMENTAL REALIZATION:

we're not going to win all the time, maybe not ever again

So...the point is to create the environment that

- BUILDS THESE ATHLETES UP,
- INSTILLS THEM WITH CONFIDENCE,
- SHOWS THEM HOW TO BE GOOD / EMPATHETIC PEOPLE.

TEAM CULTURE HAS TO BE INTENTIONAL.

**Our team “culture” is the glue AND
THE POINT of our program.**

The point is NOT to win, it's to create the environment that gives them the CHANCE to win, AND includes every member of the program.

☆ Our team's best results have come when athletes are racing for each other instead of themselves. ☆

Coach's roles as we've come to see it:

- **build relationships with EACH athlete**
- every athlete is an indiv - **AND** they have a role on the team
- cool, calm and collected - I know that my reactions/emotions will ripple out - **kids are sponges** and will pick up on everything.
- Caretaker of the program - if I tell them they get to be part of something bigger than themselves, then it follows that it's bigger than me too - **humility**.
- Every lesson, at every practice emphasizes **TEAM FIRST**,
 - **“What will you contribute?”**

UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHIES FOR SUMMIT XC

- 1. Everyone is expected to contribute.**
 - Be a leader. Find a way. Make it happen.
- 2. Control what you can control.**
 - And if you can't control it, don't try to.
- 3. D-Squad stands for...**
 - Our Core Values (we refer to these constantly!)
- 4. Build the community. Build Relationships.**
 - Communicate, Celebrate, Include, Trust, Love
- 5. Have FUN!**

EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE

Be a leader.

No captains. Everyone leads, everyone contributes.

- ***“Let’s find your role;”*** do it to the best of your ability
- Look for strengths, but also weaknesses - build them up!
- ***“We’re coaching all of you like you’re the star of the team.”***
- Takes a lot of work - have to pay attention to everyone on the team, give them a chance to make their mark.
- (Brennah story)

CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

- If we can't control it, we don't try to.
- Stoicism
 - Live in the moment, “all we have is right now,” make it count.
 - Be humble, always learning.
 - Process over outcomes, get better at getting better
 - This is a long term game, it never ends in fact.
- All of this is an experiment - **“we can't know the outcome/results,” “let's see what happens.”**
 - These words can liberate an anxious/nervous mind.

Cate:

“I keep showing up because I can’t get away from it. The people make the team so fun. Everyone is dedicated and determined to push themselves.”

D-SQUAD =

- Dedication
- Determination
- Dependability
- Discipline
- Add: Consistency



Really, these are our team rules too. No meetings, no contracts... Constantly reminding/teaching.

BTW- makes it much simpler if all you have to do is hark back to a set of principles. Not rules. Constantly teaching.

Zoe:

“One thing I love about SummitXC is the spirit of belonging. I am new to Summit this year as a sophomore...when I got to the first practice I found out the girls already knew my name and knew I was coming...everyone is so kind and inclusive...SummitXC is more than a sport, it’s a community!!”

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Include them.

- Everyone is welcome. Everyone belongs.
- Repeat: Everyone leads, everyone contributes.
- T-shirts, uniforms, etc, of course. They get input.
- *Fr: learn. Soph: contribute. Jr: lead. Sr: legacy = teammates*

Athletes own the summer.

- We pick a few athletes to lead summer work. Organize dates/times/locations for Friday Trail Runs. (Paige story)
- Coach designs their indiv summer work *WITH* them. TEACH!

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Include them.

WE'RE ALL JUST PASSING THROUGH!!!!

Let athletes own the team.

- But remind them they're caretakers
- Remind them of who came before and who will come after
- We tell stories all the time.

“My job is to prepare you to not need me anymore.” *



BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Create the environment that allows athletes to build the culture.

- Vulnerability - prove to them every day that we love them.
- Give them the chance to build traditions.
- Constantly. Can never take a break from it. We've never arrived.

Communicate.

- Newsletters, website, social media - TEACH!!
- Parents are part of the program too. They want to learn.
- Be clear, repetitive, focused: one day per week to send.
TEACH!!!!!!

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Create the environment that allows athletes to build the culture.

Communicate.

- Newsletter sections:
 - Wrap the last meet (TEAM oriented)
 - Details for next meet (lineups to athletes only)
 - Fuel/Hydrate/Sleep (tips, recipes, etc)
 - Lastly... (teach some more)

Cate:

“I have met some of my best friends through SummitXC. It gave me an **immediate family** within the school freshman year, and **has allowed me to be a part of a legacy.**

It’s definitely my favorite thing about my high school experience.”



BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Celebrate Them.

- Teammate of the Week (not “Athlete”... Teammate)
- Tie it to Core Values & character traits always
- **Tell stories** and include them IN the stories. ***On repeat!!***
- Name workouts after alum (they’ll want one named after them!)
- Rankings, Averages...long term gains, any stats that look good.
 - We try to undersell PR’s - take a big picture approach (Mia story)
- Celebrate up and down the roster, maybe emphasize down-roster, esp early in season.
- **We celebrate character more than performance**

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Trust them.

- Again, let them or get them to lead.
 - Drills, break-downs, Team/Family Moms, summer, etc, etc,
- Daily checking in: what would *you* change? Adjust training accordingly.
- If we want them to trust us, we have to show them it's a two-way street.
 - We don't know if "Workout A" is going to work, we're trying it. Don't make promises that can't be kept esp in terms of training. Too many variables. Don't oversell.

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Build relationships with them.

Keep track- make sure each athlete gets at least a little of coaches' attention each day/week.

- A little can go a long way when you have a big team
- Spread it out to assistants & team leaders too - fill in for each other
- Again: dote on the down-roster athletes. Make a huge deal out of their contributions. "***It takes all of us.***" (Kaitlyn/Sophia stories)

Don't make it all running related. Learn who they are and don't let them identify too much with the sport. We are (or should be) complex beings.

Aubrey:

“... athletes & coaches all encourage each other to do their best and be their best and I know I’m surrounded by people who genuinely care about me 😊.”

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Love them.

Show them. Tell them. You can't fake it though, they'll know.

We NEVER say "I don't care." Don't let them say it either. Cause they do care, we want them to. Use better words.

"Whatever happens, we'll pick you up at the finish line."

"I love being your coach."

This sport is all failure... ***"you'll never run zero minutes."*** ***"Be kind to yourself."*** (zoom out: average over PR, season over meet, person over athlete, etc)

BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF SUMMIT XC

Love them.

“We’re doing this for the feelings.” Lean into & savor them.

- Learn how to take/give a compliment
- It’s okay to be scared/ sad/ nervous/ frustrated - let’s deal with those constructively. *“What can we control?”*

Empower them. Build them up.

- I want them to leave us and teach the world how to be nice to each other. Starts with us.

SUMMIT



OTHER THINGS THAT MATTER TO US:

- Keep it SIMPLE.
- ***Culture/Training go hand in hand.***
- Cooperation
 - Yes compete, but...this is a TEAM - we highlight cooperation all the time.
- Parents
 - They want to be included too. Boosters.
- Recruiting
 - Keep it simple. Moms. Message is everything but the running.
- Traditions - connect the eras or generations of your program
 - Day 1. New ones all the time. There is no “the way we’ve always done it.”
- “exit interview” - what do they want from their team.







RECRUIT

- “Contribute to something bigger than yourself.”
- “Commit to the team and you’ll be rewarded.”
- Freshmen: “you’ll have 30 big sisters on day 1 of high school.”
- “Support system.”
- Practice taking on a challenge with teammates.
- “We’ll build you up from where you are now into an athlete.”
- “You’re going to fall in love with this team & sport.”

We rarely talk about running.

FAVORITE SOURCES:

Magness - podcasts, “Do Hard Things” etc

Stulberg - podcasts, “Passion Paradox”

SLUH Linhares/Rosario book - “Tradition, Class, Pride”

O’Connor/Lafayette book - “Distance Training Simplified”

Holler - all of it

O’Malley - all of it

Jay Johnson - “Consistency is Key” – whole team read it a few years back

Afremow - “Young Champion’s Mind”

All of you!!!!!! - this clinic has been central to my practice since first time I came