

Building a Track Program Around the 400 & 800

DAVE CHATLOS
LIBERTY NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

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My Background

- ▶ 1993 – 1996 – Liberty High School (Tim Nixon)
- ▶ Spring 2004 – Began coaching Track with Dan Davies & Robert Marquardt
 - ▶ Our first State Championship – the 4x800 Relay
- ▶ 2005 – Began coaching Cross Country
- ▶ 2010 – Started the Liberty North Program
- ▶ 2014 – Took over as Co-Head Coach for the track team



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Program Background

- ▶ Our first T&F Season was 2011 with 78 total kids.
 - ▶ 1 girl & 0 boys qualified for State
 - ▶ We had no track
 - ▶ 2014 – Ted Graves retired, Jake Danneman & I took over
 - ▶ We started building the team around the 4x400
 - ▶ Built the program around values
 - ▶ Spring Break 2015 – we got a track
 - ▶ 2017 – Ken Peek arrived & we broke 200 athletes (and have had that since)
 - ▶ 2023 – 330 came out for the team
 - ▶ 2024 – Mark Krause is taking over for Ken Peek...the future is bright!



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Program set up

- ▶ 2 Head Coaches (Me & Mark Krause)
- ▶ Varsity & JV Coaches – all coach both genders
- ▶ Example – I'm the girls head coach & Coach Peek was the head boys coach. One year I only took boys to State & he only took girls to State
- ▶ 13 paid coaches (sometimes we get an emergency coach or two)
 - ▶ Not enough
 - ▶ Varsity doesn't get the attention they need
 - ▶ They really thrive after Conference
- ▶ We try to make T&F FUN! Not just an off season for other sports



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Successes

- ▶ While there are 2 teams, we look at them as one.
 - ▶ We have been open 12 seasons
 - ▶ Over 200 athletes per year since 2017
 - ▶ 7 Conference Titles
 - ▶ 9 District Titles
 - ▶ 4 State trophies (one of each)
 - ▶ 38 All State Performances
 - ▶ 14 relays



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LNHS Successes

- ▶ 20 State Champions since 2014
 - ▶ 4x100 – 2 times
 - ▶ 4x200 – 3 times
 - ▶ 4x400 – 2 times
 - ▶ 4x800 – 3 times
 - ▶ Jon Redmond – 100 & 200
 - ▶ Andrew Madison – 110H (twice), 300H
 - ▶ Ethan Lee – 800, 1600
 - ▶ Matthew Morrison – Javelin (twice)
 - ▶ Eka Jose – Long Jump



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Values

- ▶ Building the program on values
 - ▶ Relays first – if I can get 4 kids a medal instead of 1 without sacrificing points, I'll do it every time.
 - ▶ Too many meets come down to the 4x400. We build our meets around it.
 - ▶ Everyone is a 400/800 runner till you're not
 - ▶ Most track groups work together: Monster Mondays for speed events; 800 days for mid/long
 - ▶ Relay order matters more than most think
 - ▶ Practice your race (start, pace, hand offs, slingshot, drafting, break line etc)
 - ▶ Every large school has a state champion in every event...they just might be walking the halls



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Why relays?

- ▶ It's hard to build a track **team** with events everywhere
- ▶ When I took over, I believed that you can build the team around relays (specifically mid distance).
- ▶ By pushing relays, we build more friendly inter-team competition
- ▶ You run **better** when you run for others
- ▶ They have a lot more comradery
- ▶ I know how relays are scored...But if I can get 4 kids a medal without sacrificing points, I'll take it over 1 any day.
- ▶ Success is sweeter with others



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4x400 Make Up



- ▶ "At the beginning of the year a good 4x400 has distance runners. At the end of the year, a bad 4x400 has distance runners" – Todd Warner
- ▶ You **MUST** have sprinters/hurdlers on there
- ▶ Our usual make up can include:
 - ▶ 300 Hurdlers
 - ▶ Best 800 runners
 - ▶ 200 runners
 - ▶ True 400 runners
 - ▶ 1600 runners with a kick
- ▶ Distance runners need to be more aggressive, sprinters need to be patient

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4x400 Racing

- ▶ Open 400 & 4x400 are the same distance, but completely different races
- ▶ Every race fill the championship season is a learning experience
- ▶ We try different race strategies with each kid and different things each meet. But we always learn
- ▶ We try different orders – order matters
 - ▶ We have front loaded, back loaded, tried all sorts of weird things!
- ▶ The best pure 400 person (or sprinter) is usually first. Often, they don't like running outside of lanes even if they tell you they do.
- ▶ The most competitive/trusted person last, even if they aren't the fastest



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400 Training

- ▶ Monster Mondays (800-1k total distance)
 - ▶ One day a week – usually Monday, speed groups train together. Other than that, it's regular sprint/hurdle/jump training.
 - ▶ All Sprinters, Hurdlers & Jumpers do this on Mondays together
 - ▶ Anyone who wants to be on the 4x400
 - ▶ Coach Tim Chambers writes the workout but all coaches run it off.
- ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ "Monsters" – 300 fast, then pick it up for 50. Work our way up to 400 fast (65 or 75) then the last 50 fast. Full rest
 - ▶ We try to build up to a pretty fast pace up to 500's, then pick it up. Sometimes a short (15 second) rest, sometime immediately into shifting gears
 - ▶ The coaches have done a great job of organizing this & getting the kids bought in. They rarely let up & do a great job of encouraging each other



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Why 4x400

- ▶ The 4x400 brings the whole team together – Sprinters, hurdlers, jumpers, distance...
- ▶ It's naturally exciting – the team can rally around it
- ▶ We try to get our most enthusiastic leaders on the relay.
- ▶ By focusing on relays, we get more natural competition in the sprints
- ▶ You can leave the meet on a high note
- ▶ Too many meets come down to the 4x400
 - ▶ "If the meet is on the line, whose hand do you want the baton in!" – Dan Davies



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4x800 – My favorite relay

- ▶ I fell in love with this in 2004 when we won State (Credit to Robert Marquardt)
- ▶ I've been surrounded by great coaches
- ▶ We had great 4x800's most years I was there
- ▶ LNHS opened – we were terrible.
 - ▶ 1 boy was under 2:10, the rest 2:25+
- ▶ I still pushed this from day 1, trying to build team
- ▶ All distance kids want to be on here. It's all of their goals
- ▶ In 13 seasons the girls have made it to State 6 times, boys 5
- ▶ They set the tone of the meet
- ▶ We experiment with people & order a lot. Personality matters here



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4x800 Make Up

- ▶ This is an area where distance kids can feel a sense of team like cross country
- ▶ General make up of a relay – much less diverse than the 4x400:
 - ▶ 3200 runner
 - ▶ 1600 runner
 - ▶ 800 runners
 - ▶ 400 runners with work ethic & guts



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4x800 Racing

- ▶ Everything changes with 4x800's in the post season. Be ready.
- ▶ 800 & 4x800 are totally different races...but not as different as 400 & 4x400
- ▶ In an 800 meter race, the toughest 6 inches to cover is between your ears
- ▶ Run for the team
- ▶ Order matters. A lot.
- ▶ We practice hand offs 2-3 times a week...including "Chaos" handoffs. The kids favorite



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800 racing



- ▶ You can't be scared of contact (1st runner in the 4x800 especially)
- ▶ Your last athlete has to be willing to bleed for the team
- ▶ Nobody can be timid
- ▶ We teach the 800 pretty standard and do a lot of race simulations to practice it. We talk a lot about transferring the skills to race day
 - ▶ Believe in the way you teach it, but be willing to adjust!
- ▶ At the beginning of the season, 59 first lap is a good starting point
 - ▶ At the end of a season 55 is where we want to be
- ▶ After the first runner, you need have "controlled aggression"...be patient but don't let them go. Nobody comes back to you in the 4x800

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800 Training

- ▶ 800 is aerobic. We spend most of our time aerobically:
 - ▶ Sustained tempo runs
 - ▶ Critical Velocity (CV)
 - ▶ Progression runs
 - ▶ Long Runs
- ▶ But 1 day a week...we get after it:
 - ▶ Always a ladder simulating a race:
 - ▶ 50 ft (off the corner)
 - ▶ 75 @ 200 pace
 - ▶ 100 @ 400 pace
 - ▶ Bulk of the workout (next slide)
 - ▶ Do the same ladder back down



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800 Training examples

- ▶ For the bulk of the workout:
- ▶ We alternate between "Monsters" & "Race Sims"
- ▶ Monster workouts for 800 (from Corey McElhaney @ 38U):
 - ▶ 4-2-1 (1 minute rest between reps, full rest between sets)
 - ▶ 7-1-1 (1 minute rest between reps, full rest between sets)
 - ▶ At the beginning of the season, the long part is just slower than 800 pace
 - ▶ Middle rep is target pace for 200/224 pace (ex a 200 in :30.5)
 - ▶ Last one fast one
 - ▶ At the end of the season, the long part is close to race pace
 - ▶ Ethan Lee (1:51) & Luis Perez (1:52) ran these the week of State in 147, 15, 13



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800 Training Examples

- ▶ Race Simulations – the other big workout
- ▶ Ladder up
 - ▶ We do different things for different kids
 - ▶ Usually 3 parts to the race, each with 1 min rest between reps
 - ▶ We never do more than 2 sims, and full rest after the first one (10-12 minutes), then dynamics again, then the second one
 - ▶ We start the ladder down pretty quick
 - ▶ Sometimes kids spike up for this
- ▶ If we have a particularly aerobic group, or we will rely on them for multiple events, we take a full rest, then do 1k at:
 - ▶ 10x100 @ 15, 15 rest
 - ▶ 5x200 @ 30, 30 rest
 - ▶ It takes a special group to do both of these. Most years we don't add that



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Why the 4x800?

- ▶ It sets the tone for the meet.
- ▶ All distance kids...and most mid want to be on it.
- ▶ It's the only chance to get distance kids on XC experience...plus running fast is fun!
- ▶ It has all the excitement of a 4x400 and a Cross Country race combined!
- ▶ You usually have the attention of the full team at this point.
- ▶ Parlay the enthusiasm to the rest of the meet
- ▶ You can get a team a lot of success without a stud (we've had 6 girls 4x800's qualify, but never an individual girl in the 800)
- ▶ You run faster when you run for a team



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Final Thoughts

- ▶ Since focusing on the mid distance relays, our teams have thrived.
- ▶ They know each other from all areas, watch each other & recruit each other.
- ▶ The 400 training has paid off high dividends in our sprints group.
 - ▶ We don't have a lot of natural speed walking through the doors. But we've had a lot of success in even the sprint relays.
- ▶ Distance kids all work more on their speed to be on the relays, and many have developed better kicks.
- ▶ Our teams have pulled together around these events & I think that's a lot of the reason for many of our successes.



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LNHS Track & Field Record Book



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