

Administration limits cross country; road runners no more

by Aaron Spikol

Last year on Wednesday, September 3, 2008 the Parkland Cross Country team was informed by the administration that they would no longer be allowed to run on the roads. Since the team's inception, the roads around Parkland High School have served as the main training grounds for the team, providing pavement and terrain variety for workouts as long as eight to ten miles. Runners would often run down to the nearby Wehr's Dam Park for variation, utilizing both its paths and the small roads that surround it. The routes were well known and diverse enough to accommodate runners of all abilities.

With the administration's decision, practices became restricted to the campus, previously used only for shorter recovery practices and for those who were sick or injured. To compensate, the administration now provides two buses once a week to transport the team to the Ironton Rails-to-Trails park. However, the two buses are not enough to transport the entire team which is comprised of over one hundred students. On Saturdays, as has always been the case, the students transport themselves to the Lehigh Parkway to run. Sports help Parkland athletes stand out.

"I believe that gives our runners a great variety," said the athletic director, Mr. Geisel.

What prompted the sudden policy change remains unknown. There is no and has never been a rule at Parkland against running on the roads. There has never been an injury to a runner caused by a car, nor an accident that resulted from a Parkland runner's actions while out on the road. Many on the team believe the shift came when a local radio station aired a complaint from a driver annoyed

by the Parkland cross country team while they were driving.

Many on the team remember being spoken to about this incident. It was suspected that a few team members had broken the strict rules that govern running on the road, leading the person to complain. Whether there was any such complaint remains unknown.

Coach Dodson, who became an assistant coach in 1997 and who took over as head coach in 2002, refused to be interviewed and Mr. Geisel said he had no knowledge of this occurrence. According to Geisel, the administration simply decided last year to review the current policy of allowing cross country runners on the road and found it inconsistent with their safety policies. Geisel described this drastic change as simply being a procedure.

"I was involved with school services," said Mr. Geisel, "It was discussed last year with the coaches. Their main concern was variety within the workouts." He said the decision was made for safety reasons. "There is no pedestrian area on any of the roads around Parkland's campus. At any given time there is heavy traffic on them. We cannot afford for a student to get hit... My job is not to make coaching decisions. My responsibility is to ensure the students are safe."

He compared allowing running on the roads to permitting freshmen to drive cars to school, in the sense that though it might not result in an accident, the possibility would remain. He said the chance of the rule being changed was, "None whatsoever."

Cross country, as a sport, is usually associated with running on the roads. None of Parkland's competitors have a similar restriction. "Running on



photo by of Arron Spikol

Cross country runners are no longer allowed to run here, along Lime Kiln Road.

the roads is pretty much all we do," answered a Nazareth runner. According to a Whitehall runner, Whitehall high school recently lifted a ban on crossing the heavily trafficked MacArthur road to train.

"We have a unique situation," said Mr. Geisel. "We have a great campus with a great cross country course. We make our decisions independent of other schools." He explained that with the sidewalks along the roads, the small woods on campus and the other athletic fields, runners have an area with a wide enough variety to train on. When asked if the campus was large enough Geisel said, "I'm sure if you ran around the school 100 times it would be enough, though I understand that might be monotonous."

This year's freshmen will be the first year of Parkland runners to have no experience running on the roads. The change has particularly irked older

members of the team, such as senior runner Tony Dornan.

"We have always ran on the roads and no one's ever gotten hurt... We have to run around the school which is boring and now we have a problem with kids cutting. I feel they do not understand us, that they just do not get it."

"I do not think it is reasonable," said senior and team captain David Strauss, "I think varsity should at least be able to go out."

Mr. Geisel, however, was clear that there would be no reconsiderations and no compromises on this topic. He said the cross country team's previous safety record was not and would never be taken into account. He did not think the change would affect the team's ability to train.

This year the boy's varsity team suffered its first loss in two years, its second loss in eight. "It's hindering the team," said senior Greg Habiak.

I will make history.

I will bring out the best in people. I will stay true to myself. I will meet my destiny with open arms. I will make a lasting difference. I will have faith in myself. I will have faith in humanity.

I will never look back. I will look forward to the future. I will enjoy the loneliness at the top.

I will zig when others zag.

I will put a chokehold on greatness and never let go. I will collect accolades, not dust. I will dance on the edge of the void. I will have more real friends than virtual ones. I will never stop asking hard questions. I will say what I mean and mean what I say. I will learn the rules, then break them.

I will speak for my generation.

I will take risks and reap the rewards. I will make the footprints for others to follow. I will learn lessons in failure.

I will look truth in the eye and face the consequences. I will write a success story where I'm the main character.

But first, I will go to LCCC for two years then transfer.



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