

# Born to run in Brighton

## *McQuaid is ranked No. 1 in the state in boys cross country*

By LEO ROTH  
Times-Union

**B**ob Bradley likes to refer to his 1981 McQuaid High cross country team as the state champions that weren't. The veteran coach recalls that year's state championship with a lot of emotion.

In the blowing snow and 28-degree temperature at Malone (near Massena), Bradley's team finished a distant second to Syracuse Corcoran. Later, McQuaid was declared the winner because Corcoran's top runner, the overall winner of the race, was disqualified for running off the course on a poorly marked, snow-covered section.

Bradley remembers accepting the award, driving back to Rochester, getting the plaque engraved with "Corcoran High" on it, and sending it off to Syracuse with his team's congratulations.

Hard to believe, but true.

"We never felt the disqualification of Corcoran's runner was just," Bradley recalled.

At the same time, there was a freshman team that was far and away the state's best incubating at McQuaid. The freshmen went 7-0 against the best competition it could find. Today those runners, now seniors, are the heart and soul of the McQuaid varsity that has won three invitationals, placed second in two others and is ranked No. 1 in the state.

Three years ago Bradley said no to a tainted state championship, knowing his school would be back to race another day.

That day is here.

"Yes, it's a great bunch," said Bradley, into his 23rd season. "I don't want to single them out compared to my other teams, but they're a terrific bunch of guys to work with. They have great spirit. They enjoy this."

The names are familiar by now to followers of track and cross country.

The original five freshmen are Rob Smillie, Chris Lyboldt, Dave Warth, Steve Rapp and Alex Ferris. Since then, junior Scott Patterson has broken into the top five. Ferris and juniors Brian Mack and George Shell compete for the final two spots each week.

Just who will finish first among the group at any given meet is up for grabs. Although Smillie has led his team in the last three invitationals (McQuaid, Brown University and Fayetteville), Lyboldt was tops at New Hartford and Rapp was first at Newark.

Talk about a healthy practice atmosphere. McQuaid

## Barons want rematch

Nov. 3 is a red-letter day for the Brighton boys cross country team. That's the date of the Section 5 championships at Newark and a rematch between Brighton and McQuaid.

"It would be an understatement to say we're excited about it," says Art Nelson, Brighton's coach since 1966. "(The championship) is going to be a race between Brighton and McQuaid and we'll be ready for them. I couldn't make a prediction. I think it's that close."

Brighton, now ranked No. 2 in the state boys rankings, is unbeaten (13-0) in dual meets and has finished first, second and third in three invitationals. The Barons were second to McQuaid by 11 points at the Newark Invitational and third to St. Michael's of Toronto and McQuaid again (by 9 points) in the McQuaid Invitational.

"I've had some good teams in the past but to be honest with you, this is probably the best, when you consider all the factors," Nelson says. "It's a great group. They're not only good runners, but they're always pulling for each other and helping each other out. They have tremendous spirit."

Senior Tim Heinle, who finished eighth in the prestigious McQuaid Invitational, is the Barons' top runner. Rounding out the top six are junior Phil Hutchinson, senior Phil Levinson, senior Nick Tsilibes, junior Brett Yost and senior Mark Engerman.

"My No. 2 through 6 runners are interchangeable," Nelson says. "Yesterday (in a victory over previously unbeaten Hilton), my top seven were all grouped within 50 seconds."

"I'm more worried about my own teammates beating me," Smillie said. "I'm never too worried about our opponents."

Therein lies a secret to McQuaid's success. No team around can "group" runners like it can. And this IS a team sport.

"I don't think of cross country as an individual sport at all," Lyboldt said. "It's totally a team effort. When we pass each other, we usually say something stupid to one another or we pat each other on the shoulder. It's not competition within the team. It's helping each other out."

The atmosphere in McQuaid's program invites success.

"I'm surprised I have done so well," said Patterson, who played soccer as a freshman before coming out for the team last year. He placed in the top 10 at the Sectionals, a key factor as McQuaid beat Brighton for the Class AAA title.

This year, he's kept up his pace.



# McQuaid ranked No. 1 in state

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"Chris Lyboldt has really helped me," Patterson said. "He convinced me that I could run with the rest of these guys."

The team is full of stories of perseverance and fate. Smillie, who has emerged as the team's most improved and consistent runner, and Warth, one of the area's premier track middle distance men (he's the defending 1,000-meter indoor and 800-meter outdoor champ), both wanted to play soccer as a freshmen. Smillie was cut from the team and Warth overslept the first day of practice. Their names ended up on the cross country roster.

Meanwhile, Rapp, the team's comeback kid, missed his entire sophomore year of athletics after he fractured his skull in a bicycle accident. He struggled last year but when he opened this season as top man at Newark, nobody was happier for him than his teammates.

As for pure physical talent, there is Mack, who competes in numerous triathlons during the summer. Adding scoring depth are Ferris and Shell, who constantly push the top five.

"They have pinch-runners for baseball. Well we have pinch-runners for courses," said Lyboldt, explaining each man's various strengths.

Lyboldt, the veteran in his fifth year of running at McQuaid, is most impressed with the development of the entire team. He is no longer head and shoulders above the his teammates.

"In other years, I stood out," he said. "But now these guys have all gotten together, running indoor and outdoor track and stuff, they've all improved so much."

One doesn't have to be an anthropologist to dig up more clues to McQuaid's cross country success.

The Knights' training habits, the luxury of numbers, the close proximity to area parks for training and the extensive traveling schedule, keep the shoes beating down the right path.

McQuaid's runners aren't afraid to put the miles in. In 1971, Bradley established his "500 Mile Club", a club in which its members have to log 500 training miles during the summer prior to the start of each season. Virtually every member of the program belongs to the club.

"Over the years, we've been a good program but only over the last couple of years has distance running come to the front (in popularity)," Bradley explains. "Kids are realizing they can achieve a lot if they run over the summer."

Overall, McQuaid has 75 runners, enough to field two varsity teams, a junior varsity, a freshmen team and an eighth grade team.

The varsity II team runs McQuaid's City-Catholic dual meets, where the Knights haven't lost one since Aquinas beat them in 1971, while varsity I competes just in select invitationals.

Bradley takes his team on five trips every fall, from the Brown University Invitational in Rhode Island to the Eastern States Championships in New York City (this weekend).

Warth estimates he has put over 80,000 miles on his parent's Chevy Suburban while Bradley admits to "doing terrible things to VW buses."

Contrary to what outsiders believe, McQuaid's budget is only \$1,500. The team raises money from its colossal invitational and parents and runners chip in the rest. On the road, the team stays Catholic retreat home, private residences and monasteries to keep expenses down.

"It's a unique situation," Smillie said. "We leave school early, stay in a retreat home, eat a good dinner (usually spaghetti) then relax. At home, you can't settle down as well before a big meet. We're actually living together. In the fall, I see more of my teammates than of my own family."

Hitting the road with his team is a passion with Bradley, an ex-Marine who now looks like a college professor.

A native of New Jersey, he first took McQuaid out of town in 1962, winning the Jesuit Championships near New York City. The Knights have been back every year since.

"As the team became better, it just seemed natural to take them out on the road more," Bradley said.

His willingness to expose his runners to top competition puts Bradley into a special coaching category. With the support of his wife Ann Marie and his three children, he has made McQuaid cross country a big part of his life.

His efforts haven't gone unnoticed.

"The biggest factor and the only factor to our success is Mr. Bradley," Rapp said. "He keeps us together. The relationship between us and him is really casual and friendly, but when it gets down to running, we have to perform. We have to give it our all. That makes us what we are."

"You hate him at first," Warth said. "His practices are so hard. But you soon realize how much he really cares about you."

"He's always thinking cross country," Lyboldt added. "During break periods in school, he'll take us aside and begin talking about breathing techniques and how to take a hill correctly . . . We learn a lot about running right then."

McQuaid took over a good program 23 years ago and made it one of the most respected teams on the East Coast.

The Knights have won five Section 5 titles ('73, '78, '80, '81 and '83), more than 150 dual meets, 61 invitational titles and, of course, the state title that wasn't.

Last year, Bradley was named Northeastern States cross country Coach of the Year by the national association for coaches.

"I tell our kids any school with 750 boys in it should always have good cross country and track teams," said Bradley, making it sound so simple.

That aside, this year's team is a special group. They appear to be clones — most of them tall and slender with mops of curly blond hair. Yet each has a distinct style.

Each runner also takes pride in academics. All carry high B to A averages.

"Football players can play," Lyboldt said. "But for runners it takes a lot more dedication. I think that applies to our study habits."

But don't stamp these guys as dull. They know how to have a good time, Bradley says.

"It's a tough enough sport that it'd be even tougher if everyone took this too seriously," Bradley said. "They're dedicated runners with a light spirit. They have a good time with this sport."

And the No. 1 ranking? The Knights haven't lost touch with reality.

Over the summer, a member of last year's team, Roy Smith, was killed in a car accident. He was a No. 7 or 8 man, never No. 1, but always out there giving it his all, Bradley said.

This year has been dedicated to him.

"You lose a kid like that, it puts everything into perspective," Bradley said. "I tell the boys, 'If we win the sectionals, great. If we win the state meet, great. But hey, let's mostly go out and run and have fun.'"