

As torch gets passed, Wellman looks back on excellent nine-year run

With all the formalities now complete, a pretty significant coaching transition is official at Medford Area Senior High in, what one could argue, has been the athletic program's most successful sport of the last half-dozen years or so.

Sherry Meyer has bumped up from the assistant position she's held since 2015 to take over the head coaching job with the Raiders' cross country program, which will officially begin its 2022 season on Aug. 15. She takes over for Kevin Wellman, who resigned from coaching and teaching in Medford in May after accepting the grades 6-12 principal position in the Phillips School District, a job he's now about a month into.

We'll have initial reaction from Meyer next week after she returns from an out-of-state trip, but I did get the chance to reflect with Wellman on Tuesday about his nine-year run with the Runnin' Raiders and, instead of waiting until next week's story, I figured why not share some of those insights now?

A goal for any head coach at the varsity level is to leave a program in better shape than when you arrived. At the very least, you don't want to go backwards.



Matt's Bleacher Shots

Matt Frey

With six Great Northern Conference championships, four team sectional championships and a WIAA state championship since he took over in 2013, leaving Medford's program in better shape than when he found it is an understatement for Wellman.

"That whole first year, I don't think we ever had a girls team," Wellman said. "We didn't have five girls all year. From the first practice where the kids asked, 'why do you have your bike' and 'what do you mean you're going to go out with us?' It was a whole different culture. Then we were just building it every year and kept getting bigger and bigger and then we started winning things."

A graduate of Colby High School, Wellman arrived via Chequamegon High School, where he had some coaching success. I remember bits and pieces of our first conversation that summer about his visions for the program. Certainly bringing up participation numbers was goal number one as he took over the program following Chad Austin's departure.

With added depth comes better odds of putting capable athletes in the varsity lineup, but I remember Wellman saying that first summer that you don't get the kids without mixing fun with hard work. At the time, Medford had gotten away from home meets and competing in some bigger invites, especially Wausau East's Smiley Invitational, one of the state's oldest and largest regular-season meets. Wellman thinks getting those meets back on the schedule was one key to the program's resurgence.

"Hosting our own meet. That was a big one," he said. "I think once we went out to Black River (Golf Course) and we started hosting that really changed things. We definitely got more kids coming out. Then with having a booster club we were fundraising. Getting into Smiley was another milestone with those kids seeing big meets like that and how fun it is. I ran Smiley in high school and that was great. I can remember they had a DJ and kids were out dancing and our kids were out jumping in there. It's just fun. Then we got into the Griak (hosted by the University of Minnesota). At Smiley some of the kids figured it out, but when we got to



MATT FREY/THE STAR NEWS

After leading Medford's cross country resurgence the past nine falls, Kevin Wellman has moved on, passing the reins to his assistant of seven years, Sherry Meyer.

Griak, the kids asked who are all those people. I said those are college coaches. Those are guys who are recruiting. It really changed things."

The evidence that the ball was rolling in the right direction was seen at the 2016 WIAA Division 2 Waupaca sectional where both Medford's boys and girls teams just missed qualifying for state. In 2017, the girls won their first-ever conference title, but missed out on state. The boys, however, shocked GNC champion Lakeland at the Waupaca sectional and won it, earning a team state berth and

finishing ninth.

The girls haven't let go of GNC championship trophies since, winning five straight. The boys won their lone GNC title in 2018. The girls have won the sectional title the past three years they've been in Division 2 and the boys have remained competitive as well, finishing third in the 2018 sectional and sending Joey Sullivan to state the past three years and returning junior Tanner Hrabý last fall.

"Winning begets winning," Wellman said. "But it was also about winning the right way and building it. One of the things I'm most proud of is our lack of injuries. We did not have kids getting hurt because we were doing hard core stretching before, hard core stretching at the end and we completely changed how we ran. We were trying not to run on blacktop or concrete. It was just making that mental decision and it showed. It paid off."

Obviously, the 2018 Division 2 girls state championship was the pinnacle. Despite winning virtually every meet that fall, the Raiders weren't viewed by "the experts" as serious title contenders once they got to Wisconsin Rapids, but the group of Franny Seidel, Alicia Kawa, Grace Kelley, Lauren Meyer, Jennifer Kahn, Alexis Flegel and Paige Brandner steadily made up ground in the last two miles and beat Freedom by nine points to bring home Medford's first and only WIAA gold trophy. It was a team effort as

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Softball

Wednesday Night Wood Bat League

Standings after July 20

Stetsonville	8-0
Russ's Auto	5-1
Cindy's 1	3-5
Crossroads	2-5
Cindy's 2	2-6
Combined Carpentry	1-7

Rib Lake wins one, drops one

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earned. He struck out four and walked two.

Everest wins easily

Rib Lake hosted division champion Everest on Friday and was soundly defeated 17-3 in seven innings.

The Merchants banged out 18 hits against three Rib Lake pitchers, two of whom — Edwards and Mateo Lopez — didn't get the strongest help from their defense at times.

Everest scored twice in the top of the first and added four in the second, highlighted by RBI singles from Logan Langbehn, Tanner Graham and Ryan Hubacek to go up 6-0. Langbehn added

an RBI double in the third and Everest scored three more in the fourth to go up 10-1. An 11-3 game really got out of hand with a six-run sixth that included an RBI double by Wade Farmer and three Rib Lake errors.

Austin Ewan got Rib Lake on the board with an RBI double in the bottom of the third. Lopez and Hueckman hit back-to-back doubles to start Rib Lake's fourth inning and Gavin Phillips singled in Hueckman to make it 10-3.

Hubacek and Brock Warren had three hits apiece for Everest, who got four innings out of starter Heinrich Walder. Josh Nielsen finished up. Rib Lake got one hit apiece from Austin Ewan, Lopez, Hueckman, Austin Zondlo and Phillips.

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by Jason Krautkramer, J.D.
Eckert & Krautkramer, LLC
630 N 4th St.
Wausau, WI 54403
715-842-0907 jason@eckertlawllc.com

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As with an LLC, a partnership interest is transferred to a trust by an assignment of interest. Again, it is important to review any partnership agreement to determine if there are restrictions to a transfer.

If your business is a corporation, you should contact the corporation to determine what will be needed to transfer your stock to your trust. For closely held corporations, you can usually transfer your stock to your trust by executing an assignment of stock.

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★ Shots

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Medford's highest finisher was Kawa in 17th place.

"That group worked so hard," Wellman said. "Whether it was a normal workout or it was a hard hill workout — and it wasn't just the girls, I don't want to leave the boys out of it — that group put in the work. They'd say, 'let's go out and do another one.' And they genuinely liked being and running together."

Another accomplishment that you can tell stands out for Wellman was getting Medford's new home course north of the high school up and running in 2020, when several meets were held there as

Medford was one of the few schools willing to host meets in the fall of Covid. The course will host the Medford Invite this fall on Sept. 29 and the GNC Championships on Oct. 15.

"It's a gorgeous course," Wellman said. "The Kuse land just makes it really worthwhile. You can't just do hot laps around the school, that would get old really fast. A lot of parents and even other coaches have said they really like it because it's so spectator friendly. You're right next to the school so there's parking, which we had problems with at Black River, and you have bathroom facilities, you have concessions."

There's only one hint of frustration that remains for Wellman as he moves

on to his next challenge. He will always wonder what might have been if WIAA post-season assignments hadn't changed in 2020 due to Covid. Medford got bumped to Division 1 that fall and only sent Sullivan to state. The girls, after taking second in a subsectional meet held in Medford after a snowstorm the night before, finished third at the four-team D1 Chippewa Falls sectional behind Menomonie and Marshfield.

"I'm still absolutely bitter about the Covid year," he said. "I honestly feel like that girls team was better than our state-winning team."

One more thing I've learned about good coaches over the years is they like knowing they're leaving what they've

built in good hands and Wellman believes that is happening in this case.

"In 2015, I requested an assistant coach and I talked to Sherry," Wellman said. "I'd even gotten a little pushback from some people saying, 'why are you willing to give up some control' and I was like 'because I don't need it. It's all about the kids.' Sherry brought in a great love of fitness and running and a stretching and yoga background. And just being able to bounce ideas off of somebody that is knowledgeable is good. I said the two of us working together is going to be way better. And we did it. It just kept going up from there."

It most certainly did.

Matt Frey is the Sports Editor at The Star News.



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