

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

Coach Brewer is a longtime Bay Area coaching legend. He has coached both cross country and track for Castro Valley High School (25 years), Northgate High School (8 years) and most recently, Alhambra Senior High (3 years and 6 months). He also taught English at Castro Valley HS for a total of 33 years. In addition to all this, Coach Brewer has been an active part of North Coast Section meet management for over 20 years. In 2017, he earned the Northern California Track Coach of the Year award by the California Coaches Association, and in 2018 he was inducted into the Castro Valley Sports Hall of Fame.

How did you get involved in cross country & track & field? What motivated/inspired you to stay to coach more than 35 years (from 1986-2021)?

At first I just wanted to quit smoking, so I asked the cross country coach at Castro Valley if I could jog around behind the JV squad. It took me a whole season just to finish the warmup, but by then I was watching the workouts and learning. I stuck around as an assistant coach for cross country and track, and as the only on-campus coach, found myself doing recruiting, arranging for facilities and equipment and transportation. And I stopped smoking, too.

In the early stages of your coaching career, how did you develop a training philosophy? Were you inspired or mentored by more seasoned coaches/athletes? Or did you have to study the sport and do research to develop your style?

I knew that I knew nothing, so I did my best to try to figure out what other coaches did that made them successful. Fortunately Castro Valley had an excellent distance coach (Tony Casillas) and a strong track background

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

(Norm Guest) and so I wasn't completely adrift. I also did my best to dig into the research and periodicals about training - - all before the internet - - and had to learn "on the fly", so to speak.

Also, in the early '80's there was a small circuit of clinics and seminars to attend, so I tried to make a few of them.

As time went on, there evolved much more cohesive coaching interaction with more focused championship events, the advent of e-mail, more aggressive sponsorships from sports equipment and garment companies to fund clinics, so it was easier to steal ideas from good coaches. As well, the USATF (United States of America Track & Field) became much more aggressive in establishing standards for coaching education, and a network of annual schools to progress through the levels of knowledge.

Were there any significant changes in coaching or training elements over the years that you implemented or observed in the running community?

There really aren't too many new ideas or revolutionary breakthroughs in training, but rather a gradual awareness of what works and what doesn't. The ideas I found that appealed to my personality and coaching focus tended towards higher levels of intensity of workouts, longer preparation segments, deeper personal commitment by the athletes, and openness to new ideas so I wouldn't get stuck in any mode merely out of habit.

Over the years, who (if any) were your favorite opponent schools or coaches? Did you ever incorporate anything from any other programs to use in your program?

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

At first, I was focused solely on being a presence in the Hayward Area Athletic League. All the other schools were my noble opponents, and they were the ones I wanted to beat. It didn't take long to realize there was a much larger world of NCS, State, and National excellence outside of the league. And yes, if I could, I would steal ideas from any source whatsoever if I felt I could make my team better for it.

According to the Castro Valley *Olympian* student newspaper, you led your teams to 101 Hayward Area Athletic League titles and five NCS championships while at CVHS. What was the key to your vast successes during that period?

To be clear, those were a collection of varsity, JV, and Frosh-Soph titles. Also, the league had its share of schools that really didn't value track or cross country as sport, so often times the JV or Frosh-Soph championships were pro forma. I did lots and lots of recruiting, wrote up frequent newsletters, made sure that our home meets were extravaganza of efficiency, started and maintained a cross country and a track invitational, tried to keep an active and engaged parent volunteer community, built up relationship with the local press, put on epic awards banquets . . . and that kept the team numbers up and the larger support and awareness involved.

But the performance levels were the result of higher expectations. Harder workouts. Less putting up with the sniveling. More travel to top level meets (Stanford, Mt. SAC, Arcadia, Portland NXN, Hawaii) to give the top athletes larger exposure. Strong assistant coaches who had the same philosophies. That team success was a self-fulfilling set of expectations based on increased pride of accomplishment and understanding that it all takes a serious personal self motivation to truly excel.

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

Were there ever any coaching-related challenges or obstacles you had to deal with?

Always. People are initially afraid of intensity. Athletes complain and whine. Parents wonder why their children are sore. Administrators are afraid of parents and often cave into complaints. Hyper-involved families often want special accommodations for their children. There is a network of club and "specialty" coaches that will try to pull an exceptional athlete away from the school coach by promising unrealistic results.

One of your memorable quotes is "workouts work". Are there any other quotes or sayings you are known for, or are fond of?

- Does the bright flame of running desire burn incandescently in your soul?*
- Running may be insanity, but it is a beautiful lunacy nonetheless.*
- Anyone can run until he or she is tired . . . it's what you do afterwards that counts.*
- Of course it hurts.*
- If running were any easier, we'd call it football.*
- You know that you've won when your opponents are afraid of your workouts.*
- When you have to vomit during a race, make sure you do it on an opponent . . . even if you have to chase him/her down to do it.*
- You know you're a runner when your fashion choices are which running t-shirt to wear to school that day.*
- "Are we done already? Can't we do more?" The only possible response when the coach asks how you feel about a workout.*

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

A tradition you started was writing short newsletters which documented your athletes performances in track and cross country meets. For Alhambra, these reviews are known as the "Bulldog Bark", and you have published 134 of them during your time here. When did you begin this tradition? How many do you estimate you have written over the years and what did they look like during your tenure at Castro Valley and Northgate?

It was a tradition at Castro Valley that I co-opted. From the late '70's on the assistant coaches had typed up each meet results, along with commentary. They just called it "The Write Up." When I came on board in the early '80's, and these assistants moved on, and personal computers emerged on the scene, it evolved into the "The Daily Blurb" at Castro Valley. When I moved on to Northgate, and brought along the newsletter concept, I was able to not only communicate with the team and parents with printed copies, but also as e-mails. (As a note, my style of encouragement (or lack thereof) was not initially fully embraced by some of the moms who wanted to edit "The Blurb" since it was not a universal "nice work darling children" fluff piece. Eventually that resistance eroded.)

When I came to Alhambra, this was apparently a new concept in the world of cutesy Facebook icons and horribly terse and impersonal text info bursts (i.e. the Remind app). I was able to still churn out the missives on a regular basis. The whole intent was to give a bit of info on each and every athlete, record the team accomplishments, speak to the team overall performance, promote upcoming events on the team calendar, and pontificate on shoes, nutrition, motivation, and keep a consistent historical sequence throughout each season.

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

Castro Valley High School renamed their cross country invitational to the “Castro Valley/Peter Brewer Invitational” in 2014. How did this occur and what was your reaction to it?

Took me by surprise. But it is my baby. I've been maintaining that course for almost 40 years, even after I left Castro Valley, so I guess the new guys thought it would be appropriate.

You visited Eugene, Oregon this past summer for the USA Olympic trials. Were there any notable highlights from that experience? Any other memorable high-level meets/races/athletes you have witnessed from past years?

I've been increasing my attendance at high-level championship events over the years, and especially since my children have grown up and moved out. I have been to the Olympics in 1996 (Atlanta), 2004 (Athens), 2012 (London), 2016 (Rio), and had tickets for Tokyo but the pandemic scuttled that. I've also gone to multiple national championships and Olympic Trials if they are on the West Coast.

What are your proudest overall coaching accomplishments in XC and/or Track?

There are many, but I'd have to say that over my career I have gotten an athlete or a relay to the State Championship in every event - - sprints, hurdles, distance, field events.

What major lessons (if any) have you learned as a coach? What lessons have you taught or tried to teach your athletes?

Running / Coaching Q&A with Peter Brewer - 12/20/21

*Show up - - be there every day. Nothing else is acceptable.
Try hard - - don't ever be satisfied. Intensity is not a crime.
Be nice - - you are only as good as your competitors. Respect that. And respect yourself.*

Rapid fire questions

XC or Track? *Tough one . . . right now I'd say Cross Country, but when track season comes around ?*

Favorite XC meet? *League championships - - it's the last time the whole team gets together for a full squad experience*

Favorite Track Event to coach? *hurdles and high jump*

Favorite track event to observe? *All of them*

Favorite running-related book? *Too many to list*

Favorite running-related movie? *All running movies are lame compared to the actual story.*

Favorite professional athlete? *Outside of track and cross country?*

Favorite professional coach? *Pass*

Favorite team tradition? *More than a few . . . each school, each team, each era has a different one*

Best team T-shirt saying/slogan? *"Dude - - just run."*

Funniest running/coaching-related memory(s)? *I will censor myself on this one.*

Anything else you would like to add. *We need more young people to be coaches. It's hard, it takes up far too much time, and hardly anyone will notice. You'll be subjected to constant criticism, second-guessing, and outright assaults on your character and/or proficiency. If you have the steel to do good in the face of relentless opposition, this is our job.*