

Guiding the next generation of runners

Rocky Mountain Camp helping athletes find niches, chart futures

Matt Smith

Photo: Matt Smith

It isn't uncommon for a youth summer camp to offer map-making as one of its finer features.

But the Rocky Mountain Cross Country Camp (RMCCC) goes one stride further. Instead of sketching the circuitous trails covered throughout the surrounding area, these kids are

mentally mapping out their pursuit of a promising future.

"If you don't have a map, you can be the most motivated person in the world and you're still going to be compared to ships," said Trent Sanderson, the camp's director. "Ninety-seven percent of people are compared to ships without rudders, while those

▶ Runners on page B2



Emily Bedell, a 13-year-old from Birmingham, Ala., is one of 61 campers spanning 41 states who will call the Gunnison Valley home throughout this year's RMCCC.

Photo: Matt Smith



Trent Sanderson (left) has established the Rocky Mountain Cross Country Camp as one of the premier running experiences for prep athletes in the country.

Photo: Matt Smith

Runners

▶ from page B1

What the campers are saying

other three percent have control over where they're going."

It's messages like those that Sanderson tries to drive home over the course of three weeks (June 28-July 18) each summer. In its fifth year of operation in the Gunnison Valley, the RMCCC has 61 kids from 41 different states that are all paying good money to be on the receiving end of that inspiration.

According to Sanderson — a former head cross country coach at the University of Maryland — it's the mental aspects of sport that separate the good from the best. That's why each session of rigorous training at the RMCCC is as much cerebral as it is physically demanding.

"If you ask a kid how much of it is mental, they'll say 90 percent. Then you ask them how much time they spend on the mental side and they say zero," Sanderson said. "Athletes in general move not in accordance with reality, but their perception of reality. How they feel about their selves every day is everything."

Embedded within a daily schedule that requires anywhere from two to 10 miles of running trails and a backbreaking regimen of strides and stretches, lecture sessions offer athletes the chance to understand the intricacies of taking their ability to the next level.

A special feature of this year's lecture sessions is frequent talks with Robert Jackson, a former admissions counselor at Yale University. The importance of success in standardized testing and classroom education is included in creating the total package.

Throw all that in with some of the best high altitude training in the country, and the results speak for themselves. Sanderson has prepared athletes to move on to powerhouse collegiate programs including Stanford, Duke, Florida State and CU-Boulder.

Former Crested Butte track star Emma Coburn, who is now running cross country and track at CU-Boulder, is among his local prodigies.

"First and foremost, he's one of the best," said Mike Fout, a camp counselor and sophomore runner at Florida State. "I feel that what sets him apart is his passion and that passion and determination to make kids better is passed on to the kids."

A big benefit of moving the camp from Crested Butte to Gunnison two years ago is access to Western State's High Altitude Performance Lab. There, athletes receive a science-based performance analysis on state-of-the-art equipment and then apply what they find to their daily training.

"One thing (Trent) has said quite a few times is you can't control a great day, but you can control a good day. And as long as we keep putting together good days, great days will come." — **David Annett**, high school junior from Tulsa, Okla.

"I really think there's a lot that I can take back home and share with my team to help us throughout the season." — **Catrina McClowry**, high school senior from Frankfort, Ill.

"(Trent) spends time with each runner to make sure we know what we're supposed to be doing. ... I think the most important thing I'll take back from this camp are strides and stretches and doing hard core workouts consistently during and outside of the season." — **Aaron Nelson**, high school junior from Walla Walla, Wash.

"I really just want to know how good I can be." — **Emily Bedell**, a 13 year-old middle school camper from Birmingham, Ala.

"We're all here just trying to build a base, so we can bring that back home with us and help our school and ourselves be successful." — **Olivia Jones**, high school sophomore from Buffalo Grove, Ill.

Participants have their choice of staying anywhere from four days to the full 20, in which they eat, sleep and breathe their passion for running. The camp is based out of the Western State campus, but covers ground in every direction from there.

A small but well qualified support staff oversees each aspect of the undertaking, including proper techniques of icing and recovery, new methods of stretching and agility training, and proper nutrition — just to name a few.

"Nobody is doing stuff like this at the high school level," said counselor Brantley Lutz, an assistant coach at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

In its first four years, the RMCCC produced 11 Nike Team National participants, two American record holders and nine Footlocker finalists. Next Sunday, July 18, the next batch of premier runners will leave camp in pursuit of equal honors.

For more information on the RMCCC, visit www.teamrepusa-running.com.

(Matt Smith can be contacted at 970.641.1414 or mattsmith@gunnisontimes.com)

