



Celebrating 50 Years of Title IX

50 For 50:

Baldwin Cross Country

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By Todd Fertig

In the 50 years since the enactment of Title IX, there have been a handful of dynasties in Kansas girls sports. The Baldwin High School girls cross country program certainly qualifies.

[Since 2002, the Baldwin girls program has won 12 Class 4A KSHSAA State Championships.](#)

It has finished second four more times, with two thirds and a fourth-place finish over that 19-year span.

Obviously that doesn't happen without a lot of talented athletes to work with. But that run of success is due as much to the culture as it is to the talent.

"We've been really fortunate to have a good string of girl athletes who've carried on that tradition," said coach Mike Spielman. "They really own that tradition and are purposeful about passing it on."

After taking over both the boys and girls cross country teams in 1992, Spielman quickly built the boys team into one of the state's best. It took a few years to develop the girls program to the same level. They broke through in 1997 with a third place finish on the strength of a freshman class that featured state champion Amanda Morford and runner up Megan Noonan.

"It was a huge shock to me that we finished that well," Noonan recalled. "It felt like there was such a legacy at Baldwin, it didn't feel like we were starting something new. It just felt like we were adding a new chapter to what had come before us."

Noonan won two individual state championships in her next three seasons, but still the team title eluded Baldwin.

"We worked so hard to get that state championship," Noonan said. "We didn't do it when I was there, but I was so thrilled when they did it (in 2002), because winning a state championship in cross country is so hard to do."

After getting over the hump in 2002, the winning continued. The cross country tradition at Baldwin has developed a close-knit community.

"It's a big family, and whether you ran cross country last year or 15 years ago or 30 years ago, you're a part of that family," athletic director Gary Stevanus said. "Of course Coach Spielman has had so much to do with developing the program, and the kids take so much pride in it. The kids have that mentality that they don't want to be that class that brings down the tradition."



2002 State Cross Country Champions

"Having a girls program that is so successful really gives girls a sense of ownership in the school's history. They all want to be a piece of that history and it gives them a sense of belonging."

Under Spielman's leadership, the Baldwin boys cross country team has experienced similar success. Both teams share much in common, training together and sharing the experience.

“It’s really nice at Baldwin that the boys teams and girls teams have been so successful simultaneously,” Spielman said. “They communicate and build relationships and they encourage each other. They feed off of each other.

“It helps the girls’ self-esteem to know they are working just as hard, doing just what the



Baldwin's 2020 State Champion Team.

boys are doing. A lot of times they aren’t differentiating when they’re doing a workout. They are shooting for the same goals together. It becomes irrelevant whether you’re a boy or a girl. And that carries over outside of cross country.”

Noonan believes that running builds character in boys and girls alike.

“Running is a big part of my identity. I’m not sure who I would be without it,” said Noonan, now a married mother of two children who still runs for enjoyment. “I’m so thankful to have been able to do it without anyone telling me I couldn’t do it because of my gender.

“Sports give people a way to find the best in themselves and challenge themselves. Running, and cross country in particular, is really great because it’s not always about the place or the medal. You can do really well in your times or your individual performance. Running is really great for kids to learn toughness.”

Of all sports, Spielman sees cross country as unique in many ways.

“Cross country really is a family,” Spielman said. “No matter your grade or your ability, everybody does the same thing. They run the same course, they do the same workouts.

"We’ve got all levels of ability, and they feel just as much a part of it, and they gain so much from being a part of a team, to be around success. It transfers over to whatever you go

on and do in life. Hey, cross country is hard. And it's hard whether you're at the top end or the bottom. Being able to say 'I survived this' will make you better as a person."

We are grateful to partner with WIN for KC, an organization with the mission to empower the lives of girls and women by advocating and promoting the lifetime value of sports through opportunities for participation and leadership development. WIN for KC and the KSHSAA believe involvement in activities and sports lay the ground work for supporting well-rounded citizens in our communities and beyond. For more on WIN for KC visit: <https://www.sportkc.org/win-for-kc>