

Nov. 17, 2011

I've decided to do something a little different. Typically, through the years I have not written a "Green Sheet" about League Finals or CIF meets. The reason? The races speak for themselves. What's done is done! As well as when the varsity group is left, I have the opportunity to take more time and speak with the boys on a more personal level.

I figured tonight, I'd share some rambling's about the race ahead and the kids that will be racing.

This will be the 4th year in a row that Esperanza will be competing at the Southern Section CIF Finals. It's not an easy task getting this far. There are approximately 80 plus teams in our division. In order to qualify for the section finals a team has to be better than close to 65 teams. That number is never the same year to year because teams (just like us) go up and down divisions.

Our run into the finals started with these boys below:

<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Elliot Myers	Elliot Myers	Elliot Myers	Ryan Ogan
Danny Ledesma	Danny Ledesma	Andrew Lindsay	Chris Harlan
Tyler Schieldge	Tyler Schieldge	Matt Sommer	Matt Sommer
Kyle Cox	Ernest Sierra	Thomas French	Thomas French
Steven Schnieders	Cody Viers	Justin Ogan	Jacob Mayans
Ben Kisner	Brody Palmer	Chris Collins	Ryan Llamas
Randy Fierro	Randy Fierro	Kurtis Merget	Amar Dholakia
Kurtis Merget	Amar Dholakia	Amar Dholakia	

Notice that there are 8 boys listed on the above teams except for this season. The reason is that we've always been able to run a man up for CIF Prelims so he can gain experience. In 2008, that 10th grader Kurtis Merget. He raced the prelims, not the finals. Then his junior year was a tough year and he missed being on the top 7. True to his competitive nature, Kurtis never gave up and ended up on our State Meet team his senior season of 2010. In 2009 Ernest Sierra ran at CIF FINALS and Randy Fierro raced at the State Meet. In 2010, Matt Sommer ran at CIF prelims.

Something I am most proud of is how many different boys have run at the CIF level since 2008. 21 different boys have had CIF experience in the past 4 seasons. Only 8 kids on the team have run multiple years at the CIF level. Elliot and Amar are the only runners in our school history to have run at CIF FINALS for three seasons, let alone three seasons in a row.

Speaking of history, Esperanza has been to the CIF FINALS in 1991, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2008, 2009 and 2010. Back in 1991 our team finished 3rd in CIF 3A. I was an assistant coach with the team for coach Medellin back in '97 and '99. Those teams were led by superstar Ryan Bousquet. He was only a 10th grader in 1997 and he was our number one man.

During Ryan's senior season of 1999, Ryan was three time Sunset League Champion for cross country, Orange County Champion and led our team to a 3rd place finish in county. Ryan also won his heat at CIF prelims and then qualified as an individual to compete at the state meet. Ryan was our very first boy's runner to make it to state. Ryan finished 3rd at the state meet that year.

On that CIF FINALST team back in 1999, was powerhouse 9th grader Mike Chavez. Before Elliot came along he had the fastest 9th grade time at Mt. Sac with 16:25. As a 9th grader, he was our 2nd man at CIF FINALS. Mike went on to be number one man over the next three seasons ('00, '01 and '02). Mike ran some ridiculous time of 9:09 his junior track season and was Sunset League defending cross country champion, 800M, 1600M and 3200M Sunset League Champion, Orange County Champion in the 1600M and 3200M. With all those championships under his belt Mike was very cautious going into his senior season. But, I want to discuss Bousquet some more before going on to Mike.

Mike Chavez was a very different runner than Ryan Bousquet. Ryan was light on his feet and an ego-maniac. Ryan would make declarations before races of how fast he was going to run and how he was going to win. I remember checking Ryan's ego before race day and letting him know that his brash predictions could cost him races. For example, Ryan's very first cross country race of his career came in 10th grade. Ryan did not run cross country his 9th grade year, because he didn't know about the sport. Ryan was starting goalie for Esperanza's 9th grade team. Ryan trained that summer for the first time and claimed that he'd go sub 16 his first race and win it. Ryan was to race defending Sunset League Champion for cross country and 3200M for track, Andy Knutson. The course was a tough 5k course down at Fairview Park.

I remember it so clearly. Ryan ran that summer, but not every single day! He missed practices! We'd have to call his house and get his butt going for the next day. Each practice, that kid would hammer the workout. It was a freaking race everyday. I was younger then and not too long out of college and I could still run. Coach Medellin and I would take turns each day running with Ryan. It was GO! GO!! GO!!!

Now from a team dynamic things were interesting. The current cross country coach at Yorba Linda High School had a son on this team with Ryan Bousquet. Adam Miller was also going into 10th grade. Adam was no slouch runner. He posted some great times as a 9th grader and after a senior heavy group just left, was slotted as the best returner on the team. Adam certainly wanted the number one spot even though it was clear that Ryan was more talented, Adam was more dedicated that summer.

Back to the first race of Ryan's cross country career. Ryan boasts that he WILL go sub 16 on the 5k course even though it's 2pm in the hot sun and will beat the defending Sunset League Champion. Ridiculous!! I thought and I also told him. No way! Not to limit the young man's spirit, but enough was enough. It's close to 90 degrees, the kid never ran a cross country race and the kid from Edison, 12th grader Andy Knutson was a 9:40 two-miler from the year before, plus the League Champion for cross country.

Can I tell you? Can I even describe it? Ryan ran the most perfectly executed race I'd ever see by a first time runner. He won. Ryan won. He beat Knutson. He won the dumb race. He went under 16 minutes. I was speechless. I didn't know what to think? It was a 5k over unsteady ground, dirt and hills. No puny, little Yorba Regional Park hill. A good size hill is on that course! When I approached Ryan I told him it was amazing. I high fived him and watched him grin from ear to ear as he looked me in the eye and said, "Don't doubt me Green." We went on from that very day to become fast friends. (I suppose I should tell any of you that are still reading, I miss him very much. I had Ryan as a student in class, ran with him, coached him, celebrated victories and lamented over defeats. Ryan later became my assistant coach and we were roommates when he was an adult. He lived with me when his time came.)

...anyway, back to Mike Chavez! Like I was saying, Mike is a different runner than Ryan. Mike had all the junior accolades that anyone could want going into a senior season. He was defending Sunset League Champion, State Meet finalist for both CC and track, Orange County champion in two events for track, 9:09 two-miler. Mike had done a lot! Mike's first race of his senior year was at the Laguna Invite. I swear the following conversation is just about as accurate as I can get.

Me: So, what do you think about this race?

Mike: Not sure.

Me: What do you mean? It's the Laguna Invite? What's on your mind?

Mike: I dunno?

Me: Do you think there is someone here that will beat you?

Mike: Maybe?

Me: (getting annoyed) Mike? What place do you think you can get here today?

Mike: Top ten for sure.

Me: (trying not to laugh) Mike, you were a state finalist last year in cross country, county champion in the 16 and 32, and ran under 9:10 in the two-mile. Who is going to be running with you?

Mike: I dunno, Green. There could be some fast guys here?

Me: Oh jeezus.

I probably walked away. Poor Mike. I had spent three seasons with Ryan Bousquet's gigantic, unbreakable, over the top ego that I just did not know what to do with Mike's overly cautious, "I think I can be top 10 remark." Mike won the silly race. Mike won Woodbridge that year too. Mike also won the Dana Hills race too. But, every time I tried to talk about strategy with Mike, he was ever so cautious.

Mike Chavez is the only male runner to qualify for four straight state meets in a row. He qualified for state in track and cross country four seasons in a row his junior and senior seasons. Mike's best finish at the state meet for cross country was 4th place his senior year and Mike was CIF Champion his senior season in the 3200M. He was our "Big Dog" when our team qualified for CIF finals back in 2001. I can't believe that was 10 years ago?

I'd like to share about the boys that are racing this Saturday.

Junior Ryan Llamas is a transplant from basketball. I guess he decided to do track and then figured he'd give cross country a try. I think it was a good decision. As I continuously have had the good fortune to work with great individuals, Ryan had fit right in with our team his first year. Now, it's only his 2nd year running and he's made our top 7 and a trip to the CIF FINALS. His journey has not been easy. He's had a nagging ankle injury that he's had to overcome. I felt terrible when he drove all the way to Fresno to race his first varsity race and his ankle gave out over a flat surface. It was frustrating for Ryan because he has also had to overcome back pain during the summer training period. He was unable to perform to his ability on several of our training sessions. Well, Ryan you are on one of the best teams in the Southern Section Division 2 teams in California. You've accomplished so much in such a short time with our team. You've won a few races last year and I believe in you. I don't need to look at times or your race day performance to know what kind of athlete you are. I've witnessed your own personal battles with your back and ankle and here you are, right where it counts. Your perseverance, commitment and determination to be on this team are apparent to me. I appreciate the work you've done to be here.

One of the best things I did a few years ago was to go to Jacob Mayans and beg him to come back to running. Jacob has an exceptional 9th grade year. He came in with a super group of freshmen and it could have been easy to overlook Jacob. Take a look at the record boards for our 9th graders and you'll see Jacob's name amongst the top kids in the history of our school. Jacob had left to play lacrosse during track season. I found out he was not doing track and I told him he must still do cross country. He missed summer training before his 10th grade year, but decided to come out mid-season. His good-nature is also a nice fit within our team. Jacob has always been a good guy on this team. He's our lone Cuban and probably the fastest Cuban to have ever run cross country at our school. Maybe the only one! Who knows? Jacob has battled knee pain over the past two

years to make this team. I appreciate Jacob's sacrifices during the summer to be here more often with the team during training. Jacob actually drove to practice from the beach in the mornings to make our runs while he was on vacation. I believe that kind of commitment is the reason our team is here today running at CIF FINALS. I need Jacob to see the future with me a few years ago when I asked him to come back to running. I told him that he would play an integral role on our team his senior year. It must have been hard for him to see that with all the junior and senior kids that were ahead of him. But, Jacob stayed. And I thank him for his loyalty. We could not have been here today with your commitment. One more race, Jacob. And maybe, one more!

I told Thomas French during his 8th grade summer after a biathlon that I participated in, "This will be the last time you lose to me." I also told Thomas his 9th grade year that if he stayed and didn't leave us for Yorba Linda High School, that I'd stay too. I also told Thomas that this team would compete at the highest level. During all four years of your high school career, Esperanza has been to CIF FINALS and two years to the STATE MEET. Thomas, I've been involved with teams outside of cross country and track such as basketball, baseball and soccer. I have experienced as a player and a coach what a captain is to a team. There is no doubt in my mind that you have been the strongest team leader that I've experienced since I've been involved with athletics. That's a long time. You are the consummate leader. I could kill you for running on your hurt foot for three days without telling me... but your expression when we picked you up on that run said all there needed to be said. I promised you again that you'd be back for the "important" races. Sometimes the mind can make these things come true, apparently. I did not know for sure that you'd make it back, but I wanted you to be back and I started right then and there visualizing you running at the Orange County Championships. Your recovery from that terrible injury was so crucial to this team. Your leadership coupled with your tenacity to overcome your setback is incredible. It had to be so difficult to go to the gym and row in the early mornings? It had to seem down right depressing to know that you would not be at your best for fast races like Woodbridge and Dana Hills. Your strength to continue to train at the gym by yourself is unprecedented. While your teammates had each other I knew you were by yourself, alone. Thank you for staying with it Thomas! Thank you for staying here at Esperanza! ... and here we are right where we wanted to be! Who cares about Dana Hills or Woodbridge, right? Come to Mammoth this summer and you'll get another chance to run.

A breakthrough of sorts happened at CIF Prelims. It's a pretty big deal. Senior Matt Sommer has been a fixture on the varsity team since his 10th grade year. I can't exactly recall, but he may have earned his letter his 9th grade year too. Matt was 5th man at CIF prelims. He scored in our biggest race of the year. This was a long time coming! I believe it was the first time he scored varsity points for the team. Matt has had a great summer of training. I don't think he missed more than one practice? Matt has run stride for stride with the best kids on this team for three seasons. He was sooooo due for a nice race and he busted at CIF Prelims. Matt is not one to demonstrate his emotions too readily. I'd like for you Matt to make another great memory for yourself this Saturday. I want you to take in the experience of running with your friends over the past four seasons on race day. You are part of what makes this team great. You chose to stay at Esperanza

after I begged that 9th grade team not to leave. I appreciate your sacrifices that you've made to be part of this program. This means a lot to me. After we almost tried to kill you during your 9th grade year at Mt Sac invite, you came back to the team! Matt, there is no quit in you and I see that. I watch you on those long runs and you never complain. You never stumble. You never look too tired. Frankly, there have been lots of runs where I don't think we hear you speak! I know how much you've done to be in this top 5! Good Work getting here!

I've really just gotten to know junior Chris Harlan. Even though this is his junior season, this is his first year being part of the top group for the team. Chris started to become a factor last year for the frosh/soph group. It was not until track season last year that Chris made his move up the ladder. Chris has been new to this varsity cross country stuff. It's not easy running varsity, furthermore, it's not easy running at the level we are racing. Our first race I instructed Chris to run under 5:10 for the mile at Yorba Regional Park. I could see his eyes pop out of his head. "I know, it's crazy" I told him. He did what was asked of him and the rest is history! Chris has run our #2 man several times and the pressure to perform must feel enormous! Even though it shouldn't feel heavy, I know that it's heavy. The experience you've gained this year is tremendous. I've watched you Chris grow into a very fine runner. You have made the All-Time list for juniors and now you are racing at CIF Finals. I appreciate your sense of humor and you allowing me to see more of that as the season has progressed. Your ability to tell jokes or repeat funny lines from movies keeps the team light and in a good place. There is much ahead of you this year and it's going to be fun to watch. Although every year is a learning moment, I'd like you to gleam all you can from Thomas and Amar. You are part of a special team this year and because of you we are competing at a very high level.

A few years ago, I was asked to help a young kid out to get faster on the bases. He was a small, blonde haired kid who had an older brother on the team. I went to the park at Travis Ranch and set up some sprinting drills for this young kid. Quiet and determined this kid went through the drills over and over again. I don't know if I helped, but when he came to Esperanza as a 9th grader he joined the football team. Maybe, I didn't help? That summer between his 9th and 10th grade year this same young boy came with his brother to Mammoth. Well, he came with his entire family actually. Ryan Ogan wanted no part of running cross country his 9th grade year and then not long after he's up in 10,000 ft of hill climbing cross country experience. Hilarious! Ryan ran a few short runs and I said that he could do Dead Man's, which is 2.5 miles straight up hill with a 2500 foot elevation gain. It's hard as hell, basically. Ryan did it. You know what? He did it very well! There was something to this football/baseball kid. He proved he could endure. Because, running straight up a hill has everything to do with enduring. It's all pain. There is not a single step of relief on that run once it starts to go up. The next year, Ryan is invited to come up to run and has a place on the varsity team that eventually qualifies for CIF Finals. As dad reminds me, "reality check." Yes, agreed. These things don't normally happen on a team of this caliber. Not many come out and start making an impact on a varsity team at this level. Right? It's one thing to go over to Fullerton or El Dorado and make their top 7. It's another, to make the top 7 of a team that has gone to the State Finals two years in a row. LOL! Now that I write it I find it even more

intriguing. Ryan, like I told Chris, learn as much as you can from Amar and Thomas. You've come such a long way since your 9th grade year. I appreciate your decision to give up baseball to run. I know it must have been difficult, it's a big part of your life and how you see yourself. I hope you see yourself now as a runner? And not just any kind of runner! You are not running through cones and doing short sprints for time at Travis Ranch anymore... you are running with the top teams in Southern Section.

Would it surprise you to know that Amar has never won a cross country race until League Finals just a few weeks ago? League Championships is a fine time to win a race for the first time? Amar came to us by baseball. During 9th grade, Amar did band and also played in the orchestra. Moreover, Amar was planning on playing baseball instead of running track. Amar was not the best 9th grader on the team nor was he the 2nd best runner on the 9th grade team. But, he was on a team of some amazing athletes! Thomas French, Ryan Owens, Matt Sommer, Jacob Mayans, Kyle Stowell and Amar Dholakia made for one of the finest 9th grade teams in the state of California. How do I know? Well, they finished 2nd out of close to 600 schools at the Woodbridge Invite. Later, they were the fastest 9th grade team in all of Orange County! We beat Dana Hills for goodness sakes! Amar was a scorer for this team! Who knew that later Amar would be running 14:40's and becoming League Champion!? Wow!

Amar, your 9th grade year, I quoted a kid on the team as the headline for one of my Green Sheets. "Who is Dholakia?" That's what happened when you were part of yet another 9th grader doing something incredible that season. I asked in that Green Sheet, what kind of potential a kid like you might have if he stays committed and dedicated to the sport? I believe the race was the Cow Run? Now, here we are. All those years are behind you and you've made some pretty nice memories for yourself over the years. Amar, you've learned a race strategy since the Apache meet that has taken you to another level. I believe in you, buddy. You have had some amazing races! Thank you for your leadership on the team. Thank you for being so gracious in your position on the team. You are a great role model for all the runners on the team and so easy to coach. You've got the talent and the right kind of charisma that makes it fun for the entire team to see you do well. Amar, you are a special runner. Not very many people can do what you can. It's a gift and you've taken very good care of it.

No matter what happens this Saturday, you guys are already amazing! What a blast it has been working with you thus far this season!