

The Development of Women's Running at North Central from

1977-1984

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Historical Methods: Dr. Ann Keating

Organizing Women's Running

Organized women's running was introduced rather rapidly to North Central College. Students formed a club team in 1974 which was followed in 1977 with the start of women's track and field. Women's cross country joined the mix in the fall of 1978. This all happened post Title IX, although as of February 1976, the college "was in full agreement and compliance with Title IX". The desire for a running team as seen through the formation of an organized running club may have been the push to have the college form an official team.



Table 1. Number of Athletes on the Women's Cross Country and Track Teams, 1977-1984

	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Track	6	3	-	-	-	-	-	22
XC	N/A	5	-	-	9	-	8	11

Source: *North Central Chronicle* (May 22, 1978; Oct. 9, 1978; Nov. 13, 1981) and *The Spectrum* (1977, 1984, 1985).

Note: The data for each year was not kept.

Lack of Consistency in Data

The History of Athletics cites the first year of varsity women's track at North Central college in the spring of 1978. Yet *The Spectrum* and a part in *The Chronicle* mention the first year of women's track at North Central, putting their first season in 1977. While varsity women's track may possibly differ from the organized track of 1977, it is still important to note the lack of recognition for that year's team in *The History of Athletics*. Additionally, Table 1 shows the lack of data recording for the sport. The data gleaned is from two different sources, sometimes counting people in a picture, looking at articles, or yearbook entries. The large gap is concerning though in that in the early years of the teams, they often did not appear in the yearbook. They would usually still gain some recognition in the newspaper. The lack of presence in the yearbook while other teams were in it shows how low-profile the team was.

Improvement of the Teams

Nationals is the ultimate goal of most sports teams. In 1981, four members of the women's track team qualified for the National meet. In 1984, Kristy Dimmick qualified for Nationals in cross country, the first woman from North Central to do so. The teams could only build upon this success. The outlook was to always keep the team improving every year. One of the factors for success that Coach Hill (women's track coach) believed was to have "more girls out" in order to help build the team. Without numbers, there are fewer girls to help one another and less talent to pick from. One of the big factors in cross country was needing to have at least five, preferably seven girls to have a complete team. Without that, the girls can only compete individually. As Table 1 shows, the team did grow, allowing for a full roster. 1982 brought more success, sending five women to Nationals in track. The development of the team would take time. Coach Phil Van Lear was "optimistic about the future of the squad" after the 1981 cross country season and that learning how to handle defeat was important in growing the team.



Student Push

A junior at North Central, Cheryl Lisy, fought for a committed coach early in the team's years. She argued that the women needed a coach who could commit to them full-time. She wrote in an opinion article "the fact is that women's cross country and track teams do exist at North Central College. So the least the school can do is to provide them with a full-time coach". She mentioned the potential of the team and the necessity of a full-time coach in order to advance to higher levels and that the women deserved a coach even if they had not won championships.

Sample Bibliography

- Ann McHugh, "Women's Track emerges victorious", *North Central Chronicle*, May 15, 1981, 4.
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- "Compliance With Federal Regulations", *College Alumni News*, February 1976, 4.
- Laura Zahn Pohl and James Godo, *North Central College: History of Athletics* (2010), 72, 82.
- North Central College *Spectrum*, 1977-1984.