

Cross Country at Michigan State

By Lauren P. Brown, Distance Coach, Michigan State College



Lauren P. Brown

Editor's Note

L. P. Brown, Distance Coach at Michigan State College, East Lansing, when he graduated from State in 1931, took over the distance coaching job upon the recommendation of his former coach, Morton F. Mason who was leaving to take graduate work at Duke University.

Michigan State teams under Coach Brown's supervision have won the ICAAAA Cross Country championships, both team and individual, in 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936. In 1936 entering a runner in the Freshman Championship event for the first time, State brought back the Freshman individual title also.

When the cross country season opens at Michigan State College, the first thing to be done is put each candidate for the squad in the hands of the health service for a thorough medical examination. Successfully through this, candidates are assigned equipment and report for practice.

The cross country practice schedule at Michigan State College, but for a few alterations, is essentially the same system as introduced and used here successfully for six years by Morton F. Mason former distance coach and, as an undergraduate, a member of Dad Butler's famous four mile relay teams at Oregon State in the middle twenties. It is a combination of over and under-distance work in which the use of the stop watch is of major importance.

First Week:

Starting on Monday with an easy 440 jog; 440 walk; 440 jog; 440 walk;

440 jog; 440 walk, the work outs are gradually increased until on Saturday the workout is an easy two mile jog followed by a half mile walk. All work this week is on the track to avoid pulled muscles due to rough footing. There is no fast work whatsoever. In addition to the track work, there is a lot of exercise work; calisthenics for body development and limbering. For the first five or six weeks much medicine ball exercise is taken. Medicine ball work is gradually replaced by snappy calisthenics exercises after the season is well along.

Second week:

Work this week is confined to jogging, same as the preceeding week, the distance being increased and workouts taken over roads about the campus. Distances range from 2 miles on Monday to 3½ miles on Saturday. On our campus, this Saturday run is held over the main part, through the woods. There is no fast work yet.

Third week:

Monday: Four miles over hills—easy.

Tuesday: About 3 miles with the middle mile about ¾ speed. Rest of distance, going and coming easy.

Wednesday: 3½ miles at ¾ speed with the middle mile at ⅞ speed.

Thursday: Tuesday's workout without the fast middle mile.

Friday: Easy jogging over 2 mile route.

Saturday: Same as Wednesday.

Fourth Week:

Monday: Doing easy workout over hills; about five miles on the average, depending upon the length of the next meet.

Tuesday: 3 miles easy except for fast middle mile.

Wednesday: 3½ miles fast with wide open middle mile.

Thursday: 2 miles easy, just here and there.

Friday: No work.

Saturday: Meet. Distances from 3 to 6 miles.

Fifth week and subsequent weeks:

Same as fourth week except no work on Thursday.

That there are no specific times given in the schedule, because no two cross country courses are the same; time is an individual problem. In this connection there is one thing I think is too often ignored or over-



Ralph H. Young, Director of Athletics, Michigan State College. A wonderful personality, who has surrounded himself with such an efficient staff of coaches that their teams are always a threat in all branches of athletics.

looked and that is that all the distances should be as exact as possible. Otherwise the runners never know a thing about what they are doing. Since our regular course is surveyed by a competent engineer, we are reasonably certain that when a man runs three miles in 17:30, it is three miles and not 2¾ or some other odd distance. This gives the runner confidence because he knows how he is running and yet doesn't tend to over-rate him, as would be the case should he run 17:30 over a course which he thinks is the full distance but actually is short.

As a general rule, all our boys take just about the same work in cross country. Certain fellows are worked only three times a week—those who my experience have shown round into shape in a hurry. Conversely, those who are slow to come around usually work hard at exercises on Friday instead of resting. As a specific example let me compare Frey, our IC4A Freshman Cross Country Champion, and Harold Sparks, Michigan State Inter-collegiate 2-mile champion. I am firmly of the belief that I had Frey too fine for the Olympic trials. Since he didn't start here until Spring quarter, I had found nothing to guide me as to the rapidity with which he came into condition. After that experience, I know that Frey rounds into shape a lot faster than my average boy, so in cross country he was worked only on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday—and there is a possibility that when he becomes a Varsity candidate, his running days will be limited to Monday and Wednesday. Sparks, a junior and winner of the State Intercollegiate 2-mile title as a sophomore, on the other hand, inclines to be a bit "fatty" so he is worked hard at exercises on Friday. Likewise, with strong boys and weak boys the work