

Notre Dame Men's and Women's Cross Country Begins the 2000 Schedule at the Valparaiso Invitational

2000 SCHEDULE			
SEPTEMBER			
9	Saturday	Valparaiso Invitational Valparaiso, Ind.	10 a.m.
22	Friday	National Catholic Notre Dame, Ind.	4:15/5 p.m.
OCTOBER			
6	Friday	Notre Dame Invitational Notre Dame, Ind.	4:15/5 p.m.
14	Saturday	Pre-National Meet Ames, Iowa	TBA
27	Friday	BIG EAST Championships Boston, Mass.	TBA
NOVEMBER			
11	Saturday	NCAA District IV Ypsilanti, Mich.	TBA
20	Monday	NCAA Championships Ames, Iowa	TBA
All home meets run at Burke Memorial Golf Course			
All times local to site			

2000 MONDO Men's Cross Country Preseason Poll Aug. 29, 2000

Rank	Team	Region	Points	Last Yr.
1.	Arkansas	SC	392	1
2.	Stanford	W	390	4
3.	Colorado	MT	367	7
4.	Iona College	NE	302	9
5.	Arizona	W	301	10
6.	Wisconsin	GL	294	2
7.	Georgetown	MA	285	11
8.	N.C. State	SE	265	3
9.	Oregon	W	252	6
10.	Michigan	GL	221	5
11.	Arizona State	W	214	14
12.	Minnesota	MW	199	15
13.	William & Mary	SE	186	13
14.	Providence	NE	174	19
15.	Northern Arizona	MT	165	12
16.	Southern Utah	MT	163	21
17.	Oklahoma St.	MW	156	16
18.	Michigan St.	GL	149	--
19.	Alabama	S	112	23
20.	NOTRE DAME	GL	109	8
21.	South Florida	S	89	25
22.	Villanova	MA	78	17
23.	Weber State	MT	64	18
24.	Penn State	MA	57	--
25.	Missouri	MW	46	28

WHO: The Notre Dame Men's and Women's Cross Country Teams.

WHAT: The Valparaiso Invitational

WHERE: Valparaiso, Ind.

WHEN: Saturday, Sept. 9, 10:00 a.m. local time.

The Season Begins: The Notre Dame men's and women's cross country teams begin the drive for a repeat appearance in the NCAA Championships at the Valparaiso Invitational on Saturday, Sept. 9. Both the men and women won the Valparaiso Invitational last season and sophomore **Jennifer Handley (Barrie, Ont.)** will get an opportunity to defend her 1999 Valparaiso Invitational title.

Men's Head Coach Joe Piane: Piane is entering his 26th year at Notre Dame in 2000. He has the longest current stint of any Irish coach currently on staff.

During Piane's tenure, 13 cross country runners have received All-American honors, including current senior **Ryan Shay (Central Lake, Mich.)**. His cross country squads have also finished in the top 10 at the NCAAs eight times in the past 13 years. Piane has won two BIG EAST cross country team titles and guided Shay to the first Irish individual BIG EAST title in 1999. All but one of his cross country teams have finished the season with a winning record.

A 1969 graduate of Loras College, Piane ran both track and cross country for four years. He captained Loras' undefeated cross country squad as a senior.

Women's Head Coach Tim Connelly: Now in his 12th season, Connelly has been with the Notre Dame women's cross country team since its inception in 1989.

Connelly helping Maureen Kelly become the first Irish cross country harrier to qualify for an at-large berth in the NCAA championship in 1994 and in just five seasons, he guided the Irish to their first team NCAA appearance in 1994.

The 1999 team became the second of Connelly's teams to qualify for the NCAA tournament with a strong finish (fourth) at the District IV championships.

A 1983 graduate of Notre Dame, Connelly was a graduate assistant under Joe Piane before moving to Syracuse as an assistant cross country and track coach. He returned to his alma mater in 1988.

Notre Dame Women's Cross Country Preview: Youth versus experience. Rookies against veterans.

These will be the themes of the 2000 Notre Dame women's cross country team.

Depleted by the losses of Alison Klemmer (53rd at the 1999 NCAA cross country championship) and All-American JoAnna Deeter, the team will look to its seniors for leadership and its freshmen for

immediate impact.

"I think we need two things," head coach Tim Connelly says.

"Some of the young people coming in will have to contribute right away. The freshmen need not be intimidated by that fact. Second, the upperclassmen need to continue developing. There were three sophomores who ran in our top seven last year and they need to continue improving."

The Irish started the 1999 season strong, with victories at the National Catholic and the Notre Dame Invitationals. They eventually qualified for the NCAA championship, but they ended with an unsatisfying 29th-place team finish.

"I was proud of the team for getting to the NCAAs last year," Connelly says.

"But I wasn't happy with the performance. Our goal is to get to the NCAA meet and do something while we are there."

Sophomore Jennifer Handley is the top returning monogram winner on Connelly's roster. The Barrie, Ontario, native was consistently the number-two Irish finisher in '99. Handley won the first collegiate cross country race of her career at the Valparaiso Invitational to open the 1999 season. She followed the win by finishing third at the National Catholic Invitational behind winning teammate Deeter, and helped her teammates take the team title.

"Jennifer Handley needs to continue developing to the next level," Connelly says.

"There were times last year when she showed she could be as good as everyone out on the course. She just needs to do that on a consistent basis."

Handley also finished sixth at the Notre Dame Invitational and 12th at the BIG EAST Championship, where the Irish took fifth place.

Joining Handley among the top returnees are seniors Chrissy Kunester and Erin Olson and junior Hilary Burn. Olson has flashed the ability to be among the top 30 in the region at times. Burn was sidelined with mononucleosis for the 1999 cross country season, but had a strong summer, is healthy and ready to compete this fall.

Kunester competed in four races last season and has shown improvement over her last three years at Notre Dame.

"The one senior who has continually gotten better is Chrissy," Connelly said.

"As a freshman, she wasn't even in the picture, but she has consistently improved each year. She knows that she is going to be counted on this season."

All of the upperclassmen will be challenged on the practice course by an impressive group of freshmen. Beth Androski, Jessica Campbell, Rachel Endress, Megan Johnson, Maggie Nelsen, Julia

Schmidt and Melissa Webb all have the ability to finish among the top seven on the team at any meet.

"The freshmen are coming in with the mentality that they are going to contribute right away," Connelly says.

"The seniors are willing to step up to the challenge. If you look at our roster, there are one or two runners who really stand out. There are about 15 other kids who can run in our top seven. It is good that we are deep and have a lot of kids who can run well."

The improved depth of the team may cause the Irish harriers to re-think the racing plan of the team.

"We need to race with more of a pack mentality," Connelly says.

"In the last few years, we knew there were a couple of people who were going to put up a very low number. We might need to adjust our strategy this season."

The NCAA has announced that the women's championship race has been lengthened to 6,000 meters. The race had been 5,000 meters in the past. Connelly knows the length adjustment will also affect the race plan of his team.

"We need to race a little bit more intelligently and under control than we have in the past," Connelly says.

"It used to be that you went out of the starting area as fast as you could and tried to hold on at the end. We are the kind of a team that, when we run under control, we have more success."

The loss of his two top runners has not dimmed Connelly's view on the 2000 season.

"We are the kind of team on paper that, if you look at who we lost, you might say we are going to drop off," Connelly says.

"I think we are going to be a better team than we were a year ago."

Notre Dame Men's Cross Country Preview:

The 1999 Notre Dame men's cross country team achieved its goals.

Head coach Joe Piane always has told his troops that winning the BIG EAST Conference meet and placing well at the NCAA championship should be the number one and two goals for the Irish cross country team.

Consider the 1999 mission a success.

Piane's squad won its second BIG EAST cross country championship in three years last season, finished second at the District IV meet and took eighth place at the NCAA championships.

Perhaps higher goals are in store for the team this season.

Five Irish runners who were in and out of the top seven finishers on the 1999 roster return for the 2000 season. Notre Dame also features the return of its top two harriers from a year ago, senior All-American Ryan Shay and 2000 NCAA championship meet steeplechase competitor Luke Watson.

"We have some outstanding kids up front," Piane says of his 2000 roster.

"They will not be intimidated running any meet on our schedule after competing at the NCAA meet last year."

Shay competed in six cross country races in

1999, winning three of them. He became the first runner to win three consecutive National Catholic individual titles and helped the team win its fifth straight National Catholic crown. Shay continued his string of impressive performances by becoming the first Irish harrier since Bill Clark in 1964 to win the Notre Dame Invitational. It was an impressive streak of firsts, but Shay would end the season in even more spectacular fashion.

On Oct. 29, 1999, Shay became the first Notre Dame runner to win an individual BIG EAST cross country title. He followed that performance by finishing second at the District IV meet and 12th at the NCAA championships. He even led a portion of the NCAA race until he suffered a cramp and was forced to lose a bit of ground to the leaders. His 12th-place finish earned him All-America accolades.

He is not alone among the top runners on the Irish roster, though.

Sean Zanderson, Patrick Conway, Marc Striowski and Watson are among some of the top returnees for the Irish.

"Luke Watson was at the NCAAs for the steeplechase and Marc Striowski qualified for the NCAAs after showing some tremendous improvement," Piane says.

"Pat Conway should also make a real contribution after a solid track season last year."

Watson, now a junior, was consistently the second Irish runner across the finish line after Shay. He was right behind his teammate at the National Catholic (they finished first and second) and also took third place at the BIG EAST championship. Striowski won the 1999 Valparaiso Invitational and finished 11th at the BIG EAST championship.

The Irish also feature a strong freshman class that is expected to have an immediate impact.

"Todd Mobley is a tough little distance man," Piane says.

"Brian Kerwin was the New Jersey state cross country champion and one of the best freshmen coming out of the East Coast. The future looks very bright."

Repeating the BIG EAST championship will not be an easy assignment. The conference is perennially loaded with cross country talent and the 2000 season will not be an exception. The Irish will be hard-pressed to repeat their 43 total points scored at the 1999 championship meet.

"Providence and Georgetown will be very good," Piane says.

"Villanova is also much improved. One of our goals is to run well at the BIG EAST meet and we have some kids back from previous years that are going to make some contributions toward that goal."

Notre Dame will host the traditional National Catholic and Notre Dame Invitational home meets on Burke Memorial Golf Course on Sept. 9 and Oct. 6, respectively. The team also will travel to the Oct. 14 Pre-National Championships in Ames, Iowa, the site of the 2000 NCAA cross country championship.

"The Notre Dame Invitational will be very good

this year," Piane said.

"It is not as deep as the NCAA meet, but it will be among the best meets in the nation."

The Irish also enjoy a wealth of talent in their underclassman ranks entering the season. Many of the top runners will return in 2001, possibly tempting Piane to raise the expectations and goals of the team even higher.

"Most of the top runners are returning next year," Piane says.

"If we have a solid season this year, we should be a great team next year."

The goals were simple last year - place well in the BIG EAST and the District IV meet, then compete hard in the NCAA championships. The 1999 team met those goals, but the same athletes that were not satisfied with an eighth-place finish at the NCAA meet a year ago make up the team this season. Only Piane and his team know what goals they have in mind for 2000.

1999 Review:

Men:

<u>Meet</u>	<u>Team Finish</u>	<u>Top Finisher (place)</u>
Valpa. Invit.	First	M. Striowski (first)
Nat. Catholic	First	Ryan Shay (first)
N.D. Invit.	Third	Ryan Shay (first)
Pre-Nationals	Sixth	Ryan Shay (fourth)
BIG EAST	First	Ryan Shay (first)
District IV	Second	Ryan Shay (second)
NCAA	Eighth	Ryan Shay (12th)

Women:

<u>Meet</u>	<u>Team Finish</u>	<u>Top Finisher (place)</u>
Valpa. Invit.	Second	Jen. Handley (first)
Nat. Catholic	First	J. Deeter (first)
N.D. Invit.	First	J. Deeter (first)
Pre-Nationals	22nd	A. Klemmer (44th)
BIG EAST	Fifth	A. Klemmer (fourth)
District IV	Fourth	A. Klemmer (sixth)
NCAA	29th	A. Klemmer (73rd)

