

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING



COURTESY

Karen London's sons both competed in high school track and field for BASIS Flagstaff.

On being a track and field parent

BY KAREN LONDON
Special to the Daily Sun

One gem of parenting advice I received is that the best thing to say to your kids after a game or match is simply, “I love to watch you play.” There’s no implication that success is what matters, and no suggestion that either your love or your respect are contingent on performance. It conveys that it’s a joy to see them compete, and that the joy isn’t about their success but about their experience.

At track meets, the easy conversion is, “I love to watch you run/jump/throw,” depending on the event. Using these phrases is a great way to support kids competing in track and field, but there are plenty of others:

Don’t interfere with their competition. The times before and after the event are a huge part of the process. They need to warm up, cool down, get in the proper mindset, receive coaching, practice and prepare in other ways. Don’t distract them or expect them to hang out with you during these times.

Leave coaching to their coach. It is unhelpful and counterproductive to the athlete to receive ad-

ditional instruction. It puts your child in a real bind — do I do what my coach says or what my parent says? If the coach wants your child to move their mark for the long jump back a foot or run the first lap of a race conservatively, trust there’s a reason. The coach’s advice may be part of the season’s plan and not necessarily about maximizing today’s performance.

Understand the difference between running in a tactical race and racing for time. At some meets, the goal may be to aim for a season’s best or even a personal best time or mark, but at others, what matters is the place compared to other competitors. If your child places higher at a championship meet than expected with a time slower than they usually run and nowhere near their PB, don’t even think about feeling disappointment mixed in with your elation.

Celebrate every athlete. A fast time, a long throw, a great jump — these are all relative, so don’t limit your excitement to those in the top three or only to the winner. I’ve been at meets where the seventh person in a race just qualified for nationals, the person plac-

ing 10th hit the 6,000-point mark in the decathlon for the first time or the last-place thrower got a PB — all very exciting and worthy of celebration.

Always have gum. Sometimes athletes throw up, and while this is no fun for anyone, recognize that this is rarely a serious medical situation and try not to panic. Minty freshness is helpful. Freaking out is not.

Show up. Few parents can make it to every meet, but attending as many as you can supports the statement that you love to watch your kids compete. Whether they have their best day ever or one filled with frustration, there’s nothing more important than being there to let your kids know that whatever they are doing, it matters to you.

Karen London is a recreational runner and sometimes triple jumper whose younger son is a decathlete at UC Santa Cruz and whose older son ran the 800m at Cornell University. Both of them competed in high school track and field for BASIS Flagstaff.

Rachel Smith is the coordinating editor for the High Country Running column. You can email her at rachsneid18@gmail.com to contribute to this column!

NAU
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Leadership roles

Football head coach Brian Wright announced Tausagafou Ho Ching, Ty Pennington, Quinlan Popham, Ethan Kramer and Seth Smith as team captains.

The five players were voted captains by their teammates, coaches and staff.

Ho Ching and Pennington recently represented NAU at the Big Sky Football Kick-off Weekend in Spokane, Washington. Ho Ching, a senior defensive lineman from Upland, California, and Pennington, a junior quarterback from Sand Springs, Oklahoma, both are entering their second seasons as Lumberjacks following transfers from Houston Christian and Pittsburg State, respectively.

Pennington, the reigning Big Sky Newcomer of the Year, was named to the Big Sky

Preseason All-Conference team.

With the prevalence of the transfer portal, Popham and Smith are not only fifth-year Lumberjacks, but also in-state high school products. Popham, a linebacker out of Phoenix, and Smith, an offensive lineman out of Chandler, have been a part of the program since entering in 2021.

NAU’s fifth captain is Kramer, a redshirt senior offensive lineman out of Colorado Springs, Colorado. He is entering his third year at NAU after starting his collegiate career at Northern Colorado.

Additionally, Wright has elevated three of his assistant coaches following their first year on the Lumberjack football staff.

Bryan Larson will assume the role of offensive coordinator, while also resuming duties as offensive line coach.

Last season, his offensive line unit

helped pave the way for 2,593 rushing yards. He also oversaw the development of multiple true freshmen who saw game action along the offensive line.

Rodney Brown will coach both the safeties and cornerbacks this season in his new role as defensive backfield coach.

As defensive backs coach in 2024, Brown’s group led the Big Sky in interceptions and stifled conference foes with the league’s leading pass defense (176.7 yards per game allowed).

Aaron Cheatwood will serve as defensive run game coordinator this season in addition to serving as linebackers coach.

The Lumberjacks allowed the third-fewest rushing yards per game in the Big Sky (139.8) last season and was second in total defense (316.5), with Cheatwood as part of the defensive staff.



PHOTOS COURTESY

Blaise McCallie and his father Charlie pose for a photo after McCallie won the USATF National Junior Olympic Championships in the pole vault at Theodore A. Wright Stadium in Savannah, Ga., on July 21.

MCCALLIE
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meet record.

“It was just the best feeling,” Blaise said. “I felt so excited. Everything just kind of clicked and it made me feel really excited for nationals, like I had a chance of winning.”

Blaise’s quick ascent in pole vaulting even caught his father a little off guard.

“As a coach, I’m aware of how fast Blaise is progressing, and it’s pretty extraordinary,” Charlie said. “Even when he first started taking little poles and bending them, he was very undeterred.”

It wasn’t until the junior national meet that Blaise said he began to feel pushed in fighting for the gold. Philip Gregorie, Blaise’s closest competitor, had a similar path to the junior nationals. He won the South Carolina Association Junior Champions and later, the Region 4 junior title. He matched his personal best jump of 3.28 meters at the national meet, but he could not reach Blaise’s height.

Blaise did not get a chance to chase after his personal best he set at regionals. He was still happy to put up a solid height and see that it was untouchable for the rest of the field.



Blaise McCallie attempts a pole vault during the USATF National Junior Olympic Championships at Theodore A. Wright Stadium in Savannah, Ga., July 21.

“It’s so nice for my dad to be a coach, because I can just practice every day and it’s really awesome and fun,” Blaise said.

His older brother showed him a lot about the event from a young age.

Colt is certainly a strong example for Blaise to follow. He won the Bradshaw Mountain and Winslow invitationals as a junior in 2024, leading to him also winning the same state and regional meets Blaise just won.

Colt had a breakout senior season, securing pole vault wins in the Winslow Invitational and the 69th annual Buckeye Lion’s Invitational with a 4.6-meter clearing to become just the third Flagstaff Eagles athlete ever to reach 15 feet. He recently won the Region 10 meet and finished third in the 17-18 age group at the state association meet running at the same time as Blaise’s age group.

“Blaise has been watching him for a year and a half, going to every meet and has just been a supportive brother,” Charlie said.

Colt is attending Northern Arizona University and is hoping to get on the track and field team for pole vaulting or possibly the decathlon, as the university currently does not have a pole-vaulter on its roster.

The McCallie family has driven across the

country for Colt’s meets, such as the Nike Nationals in New York, the New Balance Indoor Nationals in Boston and the. The junior nationals in Savannah, Georgia, marked the first time that Blaise was the central focus of a road trip.

“I think we’ve driven over 30,000 miles for pole vault in the last year, because it’s really hard to fly poles,” Charlie said. “It’s a lot more affordable to drive them.”

As a newly minted freshman at FHS, Blaise already has a lot on his plate. On top of being on the track and field team for pole vault, he is also going to be on the football and soccer teams. He had his first football practice on Monday after his first day of high school.

Blaise said he will be taking a break from pole vault during the football and soccer seasons. Once the track and field season returns, Blaise will be solely focused on vaulting as his primary sport.

“I’m going to do the Junior Olympics next year,” Blaise said. “I also want to do New Balance Outdoor this year. I really just want to try to do every competition that I can.”

Blaise said he hopes to continue vaulting at the college level, with both the NAU and the University of Oregon track and field programs on his radar.