

Boys Cross Country Overview

“Run fast, run hard, don’t get blown away,” is Coach Jerry Bielizna’s message to the 2025 Joel Barlow High School boys’ cross-country athletes. Experience is not something that Coach Bielizna lacks in his 50-plus seasons of coaching the sport. Despite his experience, he never stops learning something new. “I can’t tell you specifically what it is. There will be a moment where I’ll discover or find out or read about a better way of accomplishing a given goal ... or doing a workout, or I’ll find a way to make it more interesting.”

Outside of Coach B’s passion for the sport, he enjoys helping the guys develop and get faster. One of the thrills that Coach B gets is seeing his Barlow guys finish the race. Coach is emotionally invested in his players, “I celebrate their successes and commiserate over their disappointments,” he says. Coach B says it is amazing to be able to take a group and have them realize they have a special talent and can perform it well. The bonding aspect of sport is also incredibly important to coach. “I’ve had good teams that weren’t bonded. But the best teams I’ve had, the guys all have bonded together, and some of them, many years after graduation from Barlow, still see each other.”

The three co-captains of the Boys Cross Country team are juniors Steven Czerhawski and Bauer Heres, and senior Lucas Jandura. Other names that Coach B mentioned to look out for are sophomore Ryan Wheatley, who is new to cross country, and well-experienced runner, junior Didier Meja-Morneau.

“If it weren’t hard, then everyone would do it. It’s a really hard sport because there’s no hiding in cross country,” said Coach B, “you can’t expect someone else to pick up your slack because everybody has to be in shape.” In cross country, the competitions are a 5,000-meter race, which converts to 3.1 miles. The Joel Barlow runners often practice at five and ten miles. “When you see a good cross-country team, all of the guys on the team are in top-notch physical condition for their sport,” said Coach B.

“I would like them to recognize that everybody who does this is suffering the same,” said Coach B. Everybody on the team goes through the same conditioning. The distance that you run is not dependent on the speed at which you run. Coach B always insists that his athletes conduct themselves as gentlemen and sportsman. He wants the team to be aware that they represent Joel Barlow High School, the towns of Easton and Redding, their families, and their coach. At the end of the day, he wants to be able to share his pride in

the team's accomplishments with the alumni of the team and the families and friends of the runners.