



Campolindo's Verdon Competes in Nationals

By Lou Fancher



(L to R): senior Sara Mostatabi, freshman Haley Shipway, junior Juliet Farnan, senior Grace Orders, junior Carrie Verdon, sophomore Megan McMillian, junior Rachel Meadows Photo provided

Campolindo High School's Carrie Verdon is the 19th fastest female high school runner in the country. She competed in the Foot Locker West Region Nationals in Southern California on December 11 to claim that title.

At 16, with only three years of cross country experience, she ran a 17:15 at the State Championship meet in November, making her also the 10th fastest Californian of all time.

In fact, it's hard to imagine a sentence about Verdon without the word "fastest".

"She's gifted," Coach Chuck Woolridge said. "Carrie has an aerobic capacity that pre-determines her to be good at running. Mechanically she's also in the one percent of kids that have come into my program who has had few adjustments to make. She's able to maximize and improve because she's not fighting deficiencies."

Verdon's explanation for her commanding performance this season is equally straightforward: "I work on keeping my arm swing good. My hands stick out and waste energy. Just being conscious of my form is what fixes it," she said.

Verdon was afraid of Woolridge when she first joined the team.

"At practice, he expects a lot. I didn't know the level of intensity I had gotten myself into until I was in it. He taught me everything there is to know. We would get videos of running form and technique to study. Former athletes came to talk to us. We got information about what to eat, where to practice and I think that's what shaped me into who I am today," Verdon said of the experience.

Coach Woolridge commented on his practice experience: "Carrie is the athlete that makes coaches do their research and look to improve their skills. It's precious to have someone with her talent and willingness.

Definition of "Team"

Verdon:

"The first thing that comes to mind is a group that really works together. They put others before them to work towards a common goal. They motivate each other. They call each other out and they tell each other to step it up. People only see the number one finisher, but there's all the other girls out there putting themselves out for you."

Woolridge:

"A team is a group of athletes willing to share the burden of what it takes to achieve a goal. We take pride in making every kid in our program feel responsible for the team. When you have a group of kids all motivated to work at that level, you get an incredible synergy. Practices are electric. It's 85 kids enjoying that suffering."

She's kept me motivated to improve."

Verdon ran close to 40 miles a week, instead of the 45 miles senior runners used to put in. While upping the overall mileage, Woolridge has reduced the team's high-intensity training.

"She's the first generation of kids who have run that much. The injuries have gone down. We found it's not the volume that is the issue. It's the race-paced work that was the issue," Woolridge explained.

Concentrating on the mechanical aspect reduced the stress on his runners' bones, ligaments and joints.

"Run with guts," Verdon said, revealing her mantra for the year.

And she needed it, after taking an early fall during the race at the Nationals.

"The course was pretty technical: you had to run on grass, dirt and gravel and there were no flat sections. My race plan was to not get caught going out too fast. I imagined myself falling before the race, which was weird because I don't customarily do that. So it was really strange when I fell, but I got up right away. I was kind of freaking out, but I just looked at the girls in front of me

and picked them off one by one for the rest of the race," Verdon said.

Coach Woolridge spoke of Verdon's incident in terms of her personality. He said, "She's even-keeled and I actually told her just recently that as a runner she's a pretty normal kid. There's a lot of obsessiveness that goes along with being a great athlete and it's to her credit that she's pretty laid back. I was proud of how poised she was and how she kept her composure. She came back in the second half of the race. That says a lot about how she manages her stress in a national competition."

Verdon said she wants to get the team on the podium again next year. "I want to win state and make it to Nationals and try to get in the top ten."

"She's going to be the number three returning athlete, so a top ten finish at the national meet would definitely be an attainable goal," Woolridge predicted. "For the team, I'd like to challenge the girls to repeat as State Champions. They are losing two of our top leaders, Grace Orders and Sara Mostatabi, but Carrie is making cross country at Campolindo a very high profile sport."

Lamorinda Schools

Lamorinda Schools Forced to Look Again at Parcel Tax

By Sophie Braccini

At the December 7 meeting of the Governing Board of the Moraga School District, board members discussed a new parcel tax to bring in much-needed funds to the district. At the same time, Lafayette School District Superintendent Fred Brill indicated that his district will be conducting a poll in early 2011 to study the feasibility of placing a parcel tax measure on the June ballot. While in Orinda, the uncertainty created by the abysmal State deficit, and the resulting cuts, is forcing the otherwise financially solid school district to revisit the question.

The three districts are all grateful of the tremendous effort of Lamorinda communities to compensate for the deterioration of State support, but they continue to be challenged by uncertainty. "We have a new governor in office, and we do not know what kind of budget will be presented in the month to come," said Moraga School District (MSD) Superintendent Bruce Burns. "Our financial status is strong, but our outlook may change within a month when the new governor presents his budget," confirmed Jerry Bucci, Director of Business Services for the Orinda Union School District (OUSD).

In 2004, a \$325 per parcel tax, with no sunset, was approved in Moraga. The yearly \$1.8 million it produced first allowed the District to constitute a \$200,000 reserve per year. But

for three years now, MSD has had to tap into that reserve to compensate for diminishing State funding and cost increases. Projections indicate that the reserve will be exhausted by the 2013-2014 school year.

Last October the MSD Board appointed a Fiscal Advisory Committee that looked at cost reductions and possible increased revenues. "The district has made efforts to cut expenses and saved \$600,000," said Burns. In Lafayette, "We have lost \$1,000 per student in State funding," indicated Brill, "over the past three years, the Governing Board has cut over two million dollars from our budget." But the two superintendents believe that this will not be enough.

"The State may face an \$18 billion deficit over the next 18 months," said Brill, "huge cuts will have to be made, and schools will be impacted." Brill believes that to continue to satisfy a community that has high expectations for its schools, class size should not be increased; the school year should not be shortened; instructional aid should be maintained; arts, music and science programs should not be cut; and student support should be preserved.

"To lessen the impact of the ongoing State budget crisis and stave off draconian cuts to our educational program, the Board and administration are exploring a parcel tax measure to be placed on a ballot this spring.

The Board is sensitive to the economic challenges that many families and businesses are facing, and is being extremely thoughtful about the timing and amount of any tax measure," wrote Brill in a December letter to parents.

Polling company True North Research has been hired by the Lafayette School District and will provide input to the Board in late January regarding residents' positions on a new tax. If the response is positive, a measure could be placed on a mail-in ballot in June of 2011.

MSD and OUSD are not as far along in the process, since neither district anticipates exhausting their reserves earlier than 2013 or 2014, but preliminary work could start rapidly. "For such matters it is better not to be pressured by a timeline," said new MSD Board member Kathy Rantstrom, who recommended the creation of a committee to start exploring options now. Burns proposed that a steering committee be assembled in January and appealed to volunteers in the community.

"We are just beginning our reflection," said OUSD's Bucci, "this is something that we may consider in two years and that our Fiscal Advisory Committee is looking at." Actions in Sacramento in January may accelerate these decisions. "The uncertainty created by the State is our major concern," concluded Bucci.

Secret Snowflake – Kids Giving to Kids

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JM's Leadership students wrap hundreds of gifts. Photo Jerry Gruen

Seventh grader Patrick Hayes heard the call. "I wanted to go to Cambridge and help the kids – coming up short (of gifts) would have really sucked for them and for me," he explains. Hayes and his mom, Connie, discussed ways he might be able to raise money to buy toys. Armed with a pledge of matching funds from Connie, Hayes sold his GameCube and old games, and some friends' old games, at GameStop – he added in \$100 from his own savings and headed to Toys R Us. "I think we probably bought 50 toys!" he happily reports. "It really feels right, because I haven't donated to charity that much," reflects Hayes, who is planning an even greater effort next year.

Other families responded in the kind. More kids donated toys; kids who had already brought in

toys showed up with yet more toys. "One mom brought in between 75 and 100 gifts herself," says Lorie, "and many others donated hundreds of dollars to fund the gap." JM's front office staff fielded calls from parents on the last donation day, some of whom were calling from stores, asking what types of toys were still needed.

Finally, a happier message went out: "Thank you for helping us meet our 2010 Secret Snowflake goal!"

The Secret Snowflake program began nine years ago when Lorie's wife, Amanda, who taught at Rheem Elementary before the couple's first child was born, was doing her student teaching at Cambridge. "The first year we aimed to buy gifts for the kids in her class and we

ended up with enough gifts for the entire 1st grade. By the fourth year we had covered the whole school," recalls Lorie.

In addition to giving kids a chance to help other kids who are less fortunate, Secret Snowflake is a lesson in teamwork. "The program wouldn't function without Jerry Gruen," Lorie states. "He runs the Leadership class - his Leadership kids are invaluable."

Gruen explains, "The Leadership class spends the three weeks before the break working on the Snowflake project and is responsible for processing the gifts once they get to JM. Basically, we sort, wrap, and bag the gifts for each class. We keep a running total of what we have received and what we still need; this we communicate to the school and community. Because we deliver 800+ gifts; it is a really big job."

"When it comes down to it, it's the families in the community that make this program such a success," Lorie concludes. "We could be the most organized wrappers or best cheerleaders in the world, but if the families don't support the program with their donations, we wouldn't be having this discussion. Every year I am amazed by the community's support."

And every year, the kids at Cambridge Elementary get at least one new toy for Christmas.



JM students brought gifts to Cambridge Elementary on Dec. 17.

Photo Amanda Lorie

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