

MS 150: Riding to find a cure

Team NCSSM cycles across New Bern raising money for cause

BY GRACE KIM

A foghorn and the tempo of upbeat music mark the beginning of a long bike ride past the historic, 17th century

buildings of New Bern, past the sparkling ocean and among thousands of other supportive and dedicated people who ride for a common cause.

This September, Team NCSSM

represented the school at the MS 150 Bike Tour, a two day, 150-mile bike ride. Participants raise money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, a non-profit organization that works to promote MS research, to educate the public about MS and to provide support for those affected by MS:

"I love the fact that [the MS 150] is both a service project and a project that promotes physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle," Scott Laird, music teacher and team captain said.

The MS 150 is a community effort in which, according to Laird, "...you ride to finish—not to win."

Since Laird first entered the school in the MS 150 two years ago, student participation and enthusiasm have only increased. Last year, the NCSSM team consisted of five members who were able to raise a total of \$3,000. This year 33 participants raised \$10,000, which was double the amount Laird had expected.

"The students who participated came with an incredible energy for the cycling aspect and an equal amount of energy for the fund raising aspect," Laird said.

However, the fervor did not end

with the students. Parents, siblings and even faculty members, including Kevin Cromwell, Noreen Naiman and Michael Reidy rode as well.

Senior Saumya Ayyagari said that her first impression when she arrived was that of the Quidditch World Cup in *Harry Potter* because, "there were people in tents all around the convention center where the race was starting."

She was also amused by the fact that the first thing the students did was plop down and begin their homework—just like "typical Science and Math students."

For Ayyagari, the ride was "relaxing and therapeutic."

"When you're riding, you don't think about anything else," she said. "It was almost like meditating."

Although she occasionally became tired, Ayyagari persevered with the support of her fellow riders.

"I got really excited when I could see the finish line and rode faster," she said. "[When I reached the finish line], the loudspeaker would call out, 'We have another rider!' and everyone would start yelling and screaming."



Photo courtesy of Angela Sarnie

Members of Team NCSSM joyously cross the finish line past "yelling and screaming" observers after completing the 150 mile ride in New Bern, NC. The 33 participants in the race were able raise \$10,000 to benefit MS research.

Conference change alters athletics

BY NANCY YANG

As the fall sports season continues, athletes and coaches are continuing to adapt to the many changes in the uncharted territory of a public conference.

The recent switch from the Triangle Independent Schools Athletic Conference to the public 1A/2A Mid-state Conference has challenged Unicorn sports teams with new competition, new schedules and new rules. However, as with any test or experiment, student athletes are manipulating the unknown variables and solving the equations for success.

"The first year is going to be a learning year for [NCSSM]. We're still finding our way in the conference, seeing which schools are strong in which particular sports," Athletic Director Eileen Witt said. "[But] so far things are looking very positive."

The Unicorns have been more than just positive; they have commanded the conference this year, despite being only one of two 1A Division schools. In the past NCSSM sports teams were hardly ever recognized for their athletic abilities, let alone considered as top contenders for the playoffs.

"In the old league, we were fighting to stay out of cellar," said Davene Mainwaring, varsity women's volleyball coach. "Our current seniors experienced a losing record, [but this year] we're experiencing the best start ever. We're more competitive. We have a stronger team and we're in the upper half in the conference."

The same mentality and results can be seen across the board in Unicorn athletics. As of Oct. 6th, the women's volleyball team has won nine out of 16 games; the men's soccer team has a record of 7-4-1; the cross country team has placed in the top three in all but one meet; and the women's tennis team still remains undefeated. To top it all off, NCSSM is guaranteed to compete in state playoffs this year according to the current formula, which states that half of the total teams in the division plus one team will qualify for the playoffs.

"Players and students have translated [these wins] into a positive school spirit," Witt said.

Games are packed with supportive and screaming fans who cheer with explosive enthusiasm and players are excited about the prospects that the new conference brings.

"It's nice to compete against some of the bigger schools," said senior Rachel Revelle, member of the women's volleyball team. "There's a wider range of competition, so we have to be experimental."

There is no doubt that players are hyped and ready to compete.

"We're going to tear this conference up to pieces!"



Photo by Luis Zapata

Mark Owolabi battles for the ball during a hard fought conference game against Cedar Ridge. Playing against new teams in the Mid-state 1A/2A Conference, like Cedar Ridge, is only one of a multitude of changes that athletes and coaches have had to deal with since the switch to a public conference.

said senior Mark Owolabi, striker for the men's soccer team. "We are the champions!"

But the switch to a public conference hasn't been all fun and games.

"Being in a public conference definitely puts us behind," Mainwaring said. "We don't know what to look forward to and we're already three weeks behind all other public schools in terms of practices and scrimmages."

Also, the sheer number of teams and games has made practicing, traveling and time management a challenge.

"With three meets a week, complementing games with exercise and practice has been insane," said Richard McDonald, cross country coach.

Many students have observed the repercussions of such a chaotic schedule as they watch their classmates leave last period early to make it to games and practices on time. But after so many missed classes and

caffeine-driven nights staying up to catch up and finish homework after late games, it gets tiring

"I hate the late games," Owolabi said. "I stay up real late just to get all my homework done."

Along with a new conference come new rules, including the death of the "Smurf people." No longer will these hardcore fans be able to bare their blue chests and body signs in a brilliant display of school spirit. According to the new rule book, "no noise making objects and body paint are allowed." The Pep Band is only allowed to play during specific times and can no longer break out a beat or snazzy tune whenever it pleases. Even more, "cheerleaders must remain seated."

Despite the strict rules, chaotic schedules and numerous changes, the conference switch is finally allowing athletes to shine and, as Witt said, "It is a chance [for NCSSM athletics] to return to its glory days."