

Teachers go to the Matt for runners

Matt Hughes and Matt Bruce give credit to school coaches for success

By Brian McNair

OSHAWA -- Anyone who wonders about the value of a good coach should consider why Oshawa is churning out so many elite distance runners.

There are a number of factors that go into it, of course, but it's no coincidence that so many are getting splendid opportunities once they enrol at Monsignor Paul Dwyer Catholic Secondary School or R.S. McLaughlin Collegiate in Oshawa.

Simply ask the two most successful runners currently at those schools, Dwyer's Matt Hughes and McLaughlin's Matt Bruce, who are gearing up for the March 24 World Cross Country Championships in Mombassa, Kenya.

"We have two great coaches here at

McLaughlin and Dwyer, Rob Grepe and Kevin Dillon," says Bruce. "They've really helped us train through it and get us to where we are now."

Hughes, who like Bruce is a 17-year-old Grade 12 student, couldn't agree more.

"If you want to be successful in the sport, you have to have good coaches who want to be there for you and that's the number one priority for all these coaches," says Hughes. "Their first objective is on their athletes, that's where their main focus is. I think that's why we have such a good program in Oshawa."

The two Matts recently returned from another lengthy trip, to Orlando, Florida, where they led Canada to its first-ever victory over the United States at the NACAC Cross Country Championships.

Hughes finished third and Bruce sixth, helping Canada to a five-point win over the Americans, who are comprised primarily of university freshmen.

"Every year the Canadians just kind of gun for the Americans and we were the first team to ever beat them," says Hughes, who trailed only Diego Borrego of Mexico and fellow Canadian Matthew Leeder to the finish line.

"That was a big goal of ours."

Now that the plane is headed overseas and the competition a whole lot more intense, the goals have been tempered somewhat but the excitement is clearly there.

"We've been pretty pumped up about it for a month now," says Bruce. "It's pretty hard to judge where you'll end up, but realistically a top-50 or top-60 would be a good goal."

Both students are now also thinking about their long-term future, which will likely include U.S. scholarships for Bruce this year and Hughes next.

Again, they have terrific role models from whom to seek advice, since both Dillon and Grepe went that route themselves. In fact, both

returned to coach at the same schools they attended.

"There's a lot of opportunities in it for kids," says Dwyer's Dillon, who attended Villanova university in Pennsylvania. "With track, it's very simple, like swimming. You've got an absolute number. So you can tell kids, 'You've got this kind of a time, you should be able to get a scholarship if you really want it.'"

Dillon's own son, Marcus, who ironically went to McLaughlin for French Immersion, earned a scholarship last year to Wake Forest. He joined a long list of Oshawa runners before him and one likely to grow again soon with Bruce and Hughes, in getting such an opportunity to live, learn and grow south of the border.

"It makes coaching worth it when kids appreciate the time you put in," says Grepe.

"When they appreciate that you've given up your weekend and all the time you put it, and then to see them do so well, it makes it all worthwhile."

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Matt Hughes, left, of Paul Dwyer Catholic Secondary School and Matt Bruce of R.S. McLaughlin Collegiate are competing in the World Cross Country Championships March 24 in Kenya.

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