

Traditions run deep for boys' cross country

Yohana Yual received the horseshoe his reshman year after breaking 20 for the first time. Photo by Savannah Metzger

When walking through the

high school parking lot to find the car, there are seagulls flying around eating whatever

food they can find leftover on the ground from students. The boys' cross country team made them their mascot.

Traditions are common, especially in sports. The cross country

had their own unique traditions that athletes greatly appreciate.

Head coach Matt Jaschen reflected on past runners. "Way back to the summer of our first year together, the kids came up with the idea that in the summertime we are the Seagulls," Jaschen said. "Even though we're the Dragons, we also have a seagull mascot and it is kinda weird because when we're running out in the parking lot we'll see seagulls flying so, whenever a seagull shows up it's a sign that one of our past runners is there

The team bonded in other ways, too. Since the summer of 2016 the junior and senior boys' cross country team went to a ranch in Colorado for a couple days for team bonding and leadership training. They partook in a couple of traditions on the trip. "We paint and hide horseshoes and then guys collect them and bring them back from Colorado to Iowa," Jaschen said. "Then when a guy has a really

outstanding performance or they just do something the coaches are really impressed with we honor them

Senior Yohana Yual received a horseshoe his freshman year, "I got a horseshoe after breaking 20 for the first time which was pretty big," Yual said. "It's kinda unique because it doesn't always go to the fastest person. It's just

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 the juniors and seniors were unable to go to Colorado. To make up for the in that circumstance who does really well." missed trip Jaschen put together a few activities for the juniors and seniors to participate in. The team travelled to Easter Lake on the east side of Des Moines where they had a leapfrog race, a canoe race and worked on how to

lead a team in smaller groups. "It was pretty much a bunch of different competitions and we had a leaderboard for individuals and had a winner for the juniors and for the seniors," junior Stephen Beaman said. Junior Eli Erickson was hopeful he would be able to go to Colorado next summer for his senior year to

experience something they had heard so much about. "You know it's sad that I'll only be able to go one year." Junior Joe Kerber agreed. "I was hoping to go to Colorado next year. I think Jaschen handled it really well this

year with being able to go to Jester and all those other locations in Iowa." Traditions helped the cross country team connect participants from the past, present and future. "That's one of the things that attracts me to the sports is like the traditions and how close these guys are," Erickson said. "These traditions have been done for years and years and it's just good to be a part of something that's

a lot bigger than me, for something that's gone on for so long."

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"It's (scavenger hunt) a huge team bonding thing, and i feel like it definitely works. Like I said we all just got closer in our little pods and it makes our team chemistry much, much better on the court."

•Dasha Svitashev '22



Juniors Dasha Svitashev and Ava Smithson, freshman Maeve Rehmann and junior Jaeden Thompson.

"The best part of the scavenger hunt was getting to drive around to places in Johnston with my friends on the volleyball team. We chose to go to Chris' (Wiedmann) Room because it was on the scavenger hunt list and we thought it could be a funny picture as well because Chris is the athletic trainer so a lot of athletes new him pretty well." •Lauren England '21

Junior Ava Smithson, trainer Chris Wiedmann, seniors Taryn Mock and Lauren England.

"We have a stuffed cat, his name is Church. It started when Josie Hovey got it for our coach somehow, I don't really know the exact story. She graduated in 2019 and then it's just been passed down through the seniors. A junior has it right now, but it's technically our responsibility. So we just bring him like everywhere we go as a team." •Abbie McLaren '21

"We have this weird cat that we carry around. His name is Church. He's kinda a mess. I think he had a tail at one point but it's not there anymore. We just dress him up and kick him around and kinda abuse him. He's just our team mascot which is weird, but you know." •Nova Thornton '21 "The Dragon hat is the senior" leader 'award' and it was previously held by Alex Spear and at the banquet was given to Isaac Hodapp. The Dragon hat is an accessory that denotesleadership.Thesenior leader (only one of them) will wear it at meets and hype the team up." •Ryan Overton '22



The golden head is a swimmer-made award, it goes to the person who had the best "bad" hair cut when we shave our heads." •Ryan Overton '22

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