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Thursday, 14 July 2011

Dreyer changes lives with x-country running



When seven-time Dusi Canoe Marathon winner, Martin Dreyer, started his Change a Life (CAL) Academy in 2009, his focus was on the discipline of paddling and preparing athletes from the Dusi Valley for competitive kayak racing. Now, with multiple gold and silver medals to their credit, CAL has expanded to include a schools' running programme.

Although CAL has experienced incredible success in paddling, only a dozen paddlers can be accommodated because of space limitations to transporting athletes and kayaks. Dreyer is in the Valley daily for training and he has seen many other youth with athletic potential. He is now able to access and encourage these children through CAL's X-country Schools League, which he started in March.

Nagle Dam is the Academy's hub as it is within walking or cycling distance for the CAL paddlers. The League is currently running in six schools located near the dam. There are three primary and three high schools and a time trial is held at each school every Thursday afternoon. Participation varies from school to school.

"There can be 30 to 80 children from a school at each time trial," says Dreyer. "They know that only 20 will get selected to represent their school, so we find that only the more capable and competitive runners take part regularly. The other children do the other sports available at their schools: soccer for the boys and netball for the girls."

Dreyer says that around 20 percent of the runners are female but adds that they are of a high standard. He has observed that the girls often run in groups of three or four and are very sportsman-like to each other, often crossing the finishing line together.

"The guys," he says, "are 'each to his own' and they try to beat their teammates as best as they can".

Kwanda Mhlophe, who won U18 at Dusi last year, placed 11th this year and came third at The Unlimited Non-stop Dusi Canoe Race in March, coordinates and manages the CAL athletes who monitor the schools. As 'Running Monitors', they are responsible for setting up the run, mixing the USN energy drink and recording times each week.

"I always go into the Valley to 'keep my finger on the pulse' and give constructive criticism/encouragement here and there. With Kwanda doing a great job in organising the Running Monitors and delivering the time sheets, it all runs smoothly," says Dreyer.

As a result of his paddling achievements, Mhlope received a bursary last year to study Agriculture and Economics at the university in Pietermaritzburg; he is in his second year.

The Running Monitors, who are all CAL athletes, have contributed greatly to the success of the League. "Some of my athletes went to the schools in the League; some are still in the schools. They are wonderful role models and they are looked up to by their community as they are top achievers in sport," says Dreyer.

The League is held throughout the school term. At the end of the term, each school sends their 20 best runners (six girls and 14 boys), based on fastest times, to compete in the Inter-Schools Sports Day held at Nagle Dam. They run over a distance of four kilometres, for juniors, and seven kilometres, for seniors. The Top 10 runners from a school count towards that school's result.

First prize for primary and high schools is an eat-as-much-as-you-like meal at Spur and a movie for the 10 runners, sports teacher and headmaster. Second prize is similar, but without the movie and third prize awards food parcels to the 10 runners. The best runners from this Sports Day attend a cross-country meeting at Hilton College.

"When we were approached by Martin, a couple of years ago, we were immediately impressed by his passion and commitment to the Change a Life athletes, and to making a real difference to the lives of not just his 'pupils' but to their families and extended families. We know that every Rand and Cent goes to support his academy and this makes it a very easy decision for Hi-Tec to offer its continued support," says Ian Little, Hi-Tec's marketing manager.

The second term of the League will resume after the July school holidays.



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About Change a Life

The Change a Life (CAL) Academy was started in 2009 by seven-times Dusi winner, Martin Dreyer. His objective is to empower selected individuals through sport participation by providing them with invaluable life and entrepreneurial skills. There are currently 14 athletes, who are trained and supported by Dreyer. The Academy provides its athletes with coaching, shoes, clothing, sports equipment, nutritional supplements and even physiotherapy treatment. CAL also provides assistance with school fees and the means for the athletes to obtain driver's licenses. Athletes are 'paid' in weekly food parcels, which helps to support their families. CAL is supported by sponsors, who provide products and funding, which makes all of this possible. The CAL X-country Schools League started in March 2011 and is currently in six schools near Nagel Dam. CAL's sponsors include Computershare, USN, Hi-Tec and 'Best 4 you'. www.martindreyeracademy.com.

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