

# SEMINOLE STRIDERS

Their names do not show up in the headlines, nor do they receive full scholarships to continue competing at the intercollegiate level. What the Seminole Striders do get, however, is a chance to keep running.

The program, which offers expanded opportunities to female cross country runners, began under current Florida State cross country coach Bob Braman, who ran a similar program while coaching at the University of South Florida.

"I am really excited about the Striders program, which is now in its fifth year," said Braman. "The level of the athletes coming in has gotten so good that the average time of a strider for a 5K is between 20 and 21 minutes and when we started it was probably 24 minutes."

Through the Seminole Striders program, female runners have a chance to suit up and run with the Tribe's cross country team. However as Coach Braman is quick to point out, the Seminole Striders is a running club. They are viewed the same as any other runner on the team, which means they have to attend practice everyday, do community service, fund-raising and maintain their academics.

On the side of the coaching staff and administration, the runners are treated equally - they are given all the perks associated with being student-athletes, given equipment and coaching, and are allowed to compete in cross country meets.

"In cross country we have a unique opportunity where you can put an unlimited amount of people at the starting line," Braman explained. "It's not like most sports where you have a limited number of positions, and you would just be putting more people on the bench.

"In cross country, we literally can put them into action. They can go out and train and compete."

To help maintain the concept that there are no differences between the Striders and the scholarship runners, the team budgeted for extra equipment to outfit the extra runners. The team also budgeted for and structured competition for the Striders.

"There are cross country races that are unlimited in size, such as the FSU Invitational, which we host," Braman said. "We took them down to the Disney Invitational, which was an overnight meet, and we also took them to the Flrunners.com Invitational, where they finished third overall, which was great."

Another benefit of the program is that it is not any more difficult to coach additional athletes in cross country, as it may be in other sports.

"It's a fitness and conditioning oriented sport, so everybody's conditioning and running and training," Braman noted. "You still have the fine tunings you do with your elite athletes, but we can condition maybe as many as 50 athletes."

Since the Striders receive constant training and coaching, many improve dramatically, as in the cases of Anne Clinton and Abbie Day. Clinton joined the Striders in 2002 and developed to the point where she earned a spot in the Seminoles' top nine and varsity-travel squad en route to finishing the 2003 campaign on the All-NCAA South Region team. Clinton solidified the middle of the lineup consistently, crossing the line third in three of the



team's biggest meets. The Richmond, Ind., native earned NCAA South Region team honors after posting a collegiate best 6K time of 21:43.16. Clinton then went to the 2003 NCAA National Championship where she finished in the Seminoles' top five. Clinton ran three straight personal best times at the end of the 2003 in one of the most successful seasons yet for the women's team.

Abbie Day was another walk-on strider, who ended up running in the varsity seven during her freshman year. During that season, Day went on to qualify and compete in the ACC Championships.

"We are getting quite a few more potential varsity athletes from our Strider program," said Braman. "You get to see student-athletes coming in that you can get really excited about and that you could possibly see two years down the road making varsity, the top seven or really making the difference in going to nationals."

Despite the lack of fanfare surrounding the program, the Striders are not a well-guarded secret. The coaching staff has promoted the program in high schools throughout the state of Florida, by preparing a brochure, running clinics, and putting the program up on the track and field website.

"The program has caught a lot of momentum in high school programs and we are now to a point where they seek us out," said Braman.

As part of the deal to expand the roster, FSU Athletic Director Dave Hart and Associate Athletic Director Charlie Carr wanted to ensure the Striders had a leader, and that the cross country coaching staff was not stretched out. Coach Braman and the athletic department have used graduate assistants selected specifically to work with the program.

The benefits of the program are evident on both sides. From the standpoint of the FSU athletics department, the team extends the number of opportunities for female athletes without having to break the bank starting up a new program.

The female runners who participate in the program also get a lot out of it. They have the chance to continue to participate in the sport they love at the intercollegiate level, receive top-level coaching, and can continue to develop as runners.