Characteristics of Success

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In the fall of 1966 Allen Carius assumed the responsibility of head cross country coach at North Central College. This thesis looks at how Carius has been able to win thirteen National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III National Championships, while also finishing as runner-up thirteen times since 1973. Original research for this project was conducted through interviews and through compiling a variety of other primary source material available through the college archives. Also, research was conducted through the extensive use of secondary sources focused on running and college athletics in general, which allowed the uniqueness of the program to be contextualized in regards to other collegiate athletic teams. Results show that the success of Carius is due to his ability teach life lessons through cross country to the young men on his team, with the support of North Central College and NCAA Division III athletics, which possess similar values.
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The cross country program at North Central College does not exist in a vacuum. Throughout its history, factors such as its coaching staff, its role as a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III program, and its affiliation with a liberal arts college such as North Central have shaped the North Central cross country team into a dominant program that teaches the young men who come through it to become winners in life. In a logical way all of these factors build on one another. The values that are instilled in team members stem from the coaching staff. In turn, the values that are acquired and passed on to the athletes from the coaching staff are main pillars seen throughout NCAA Division III athletics. Finally, the schools that make up NCAA Division III all regard these very same values as crucial components of their education of the young men and women who come through their institutions.

Cross country began at North Central College, then called North-Western College, in the fall of 1920.¹ Fifteen runners, or harriers, tried out for the team. The coach, Mr. Walton, then selected eight of them to compose the college’s first cross country team. At the end of the 1920 season, the team had not won a single meet. Each race course was different and ranged from two and a half to five miles. After this shaky inaugural season, the team moved on and won more meets the next year. They defeated colleges like LaGrange, Knox, and Wheaton. The team had greatly improved from the year before. As the years went on the team continued to experience ups and downs as it grew and competed in the now disbanded Illinois Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IIAC). During this time the college itself also saw tremendous growth through the building of what was then a state of the art athletic facility in Merner Field House in  

1931. Merner would continue to serve as home base for the team throughout this time as a legitimate outdoor track was not built until 1977.

Roughly forty years after that inaugural season, the 1965 team was coached by Gerry Stormer. This year’s team consisted of eight runners and went on to become a fairly successful team. Only losing to Wheaton College, their dual meet record was nine wins and one loss. The runners continued on their dual meet successes and captured the conference crown. Jim Barber, the team’s number one runner at the time, won the meet in a time of 20:45 for the four mile race. The team scored an all-time low of forty points, beating out Augustana College’s sixty-four points. This was North Central’s fourth straight conference title, and the team used this momentum to carry them to the national meet. At the national meet, the 1965 team went on to take twenty-fifth place. This was the best team place ever in North Central’s history. Leading the way individually was Barber in seventy-seventh place.

Even though the size and success of the 1965 team was very similar to that of forty five years earlier, much had changed around the team in those years. In 1946 the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) was founded with cross country becoming a conference sponsored sport in 1960. Through the years, the faces of the conference have changed, as schools such as Elmhurst College, Wheaton College, and Carthage College have left only to later return. On the other hand, schools such as Illinois College, Lake Forest College, and Carroll University have found a new home

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elsewhere. Nationally speaking, the NCAA was set up in a two-tier University and College Division until 1972. At the same time, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) was only established in 1952, adding cross country in 1956. Although the team participated in the national meet, North Central was not highly regarded at the national level until a man by the name of Al Carius would come to the college and transform the next forty five years of cross country history.

In the summer of 1966, Carius was working at his father’s Dairy Queen when he got a life changing phone call. The man on the other line was Bob Wright, the head coach of the University of Illinois, and he was calling about a job opportunity at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. Wright had previously informed Ralph McAlister, the athletic director at North Central, that Carius would be a good fit for McAlister’s need of a head cross country and track coach. Carius though had already made a verbal commitment to Sheldon Fordam of the University of Illinois Circle Campus about being the head of the physical education department there and he remained hesitant about how living in Chicago would affect his running career. Chicago’s city life and lack of open areas were not exactly conducive to one’s training. On the other hand, when Carius visited North Central, the small-town atmosphere instantly reminded him of his hometown, Morton, Illinois. In addition, by taking the position at North Central, he was guaranteed to be able to continue his competitive running career. With the help of the

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9 Al Carius, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 1, 2009.
1965 head coach, Gerry Stormer, Carius made the transition to head coach with enthusiasm and a positive outlook.

In the years since Carius’s arrival, many things have changed at North Central College and in the city of Naperville. The college’s enrollment has gone from 870 students in 1970, to 1,296 in 1980, 2,585 in 1990, and 2,532 in 2000. At the same time, the endowment has grown as well from $2.3 million in 1970, to $4.1 million in 1980, $10.1 million in 1990, and $56 million in 2000. As for the city of Naperville, its population has ballooned from 12,933 people in 1960 to 128,358 in the year 2000. Much of the growth of Naperville has been as a result of expansion in the 1950s and 1960s that brought highways that connected Naperville to Chicago. Also expanding during this time was the city of Naperville itself. Comprised of 1,724 acres in 1960, it doubled its size by annexing 1,596 additional acres. Expansion in size also brought expansion in other ways as the Last Fling Labor Day celebration began in 1965 and Naperville North High School was constructed in 1967. When Carius first arrived in Naperville, it was a different time, a time when Naperville Pharmacy, Van Ham’s shoe store, Dutch Mill Candies, and Trudy’s Flowers were some of the area businesses one would walk by during a stroll through downtown Naperville. Since that time many new corporations have relocated to Naperville and the surrounding areas as builders simultaneously worked to satisfy the new demand for residential buildings.

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11 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
Not to be left out of the equation, the size of the cross country team has also seen significant growth. From fifteen athletes in 1970, to twenty-five in 1980, thirty in 1990, and forty in 2000. Carius credits the growth of Naperville and North Central College in helping the team to grow as well. Specifically Carius stated that having North Central College located in the city of Naperville provides national name recognition that enhances recruiting.\textsuperscript{16} Now both the cross country program and the college as a whole can recruit student athletes on the premise that at North Central they can experience the best of both worlds with a small liberal arts college in an exciting and vibrating city. When asked about potential negatives of the growth of Naperville, the only thing Carius could point to is the constant concern he carries these days about athletes running alongside busy streets. Although gone are the days of the safe, quiet country lanes to run on, the construction of the Naperville Riverwalk in 1981, and a variety of other trails has helped to satisfy the needs of the runners as both they, the college, and the city of Naperville continue to grow.

During all of this though, one thing has remained constant. That constant has been Carius and his philosophy. Coming from humble roots, Carius came to North Central confident that if he could instill his main values of hard work, discipline, and a sense of selflessness into the team that he would inherit, that the team would embark on an enjoyable journey that would lead them to success.\textsuperscript{17} Although this process was not something that was done overnight, through staying the course, Carius and the cross country team were able to see the fruits of their labor.

\textsuperscript{16} Carius, \textit{supra} n. 7.
\textsuperscript{17} Carius, \textit{supra} n. 7.
The fruits of their labors finally began to surface in 1974. For this was the year that the team won its first of its current streak of thirty-six consecutive CCIW Cross Country Championships. One year later, and two years since the NCAA established national championships for Division III schools in 1973, North Central won the 1975 NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championship. Since that time, the team has won twelve additional national titles in 1976, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2009.¹⁸ There have been ninety-four NCAA Division III All-Americans. In the 1982 NCAA Division III National Championship North Central set the record for the lowest score ever recorded at the national championship meet with fifty-one points. This record stood until 1993 when it was bested by another North Central team whose team score of thirty-two points still stands as the record today. Every year, the team has grown on the shoulders of runners from the past. At the beginning of Carius’s coaching career the runners hoped to do well. Today they expect to win. They come into each race knowing that they are as good as any team in the country and expecting to do well.

As successful as the team has been though, Carius is always adamant in taking full responsibility for the downfall that the team experienced during the 2005 cross country season. The team barely squeaked out the conference championship, winning by only two points, and also finished out of the top ten at the NCAA Division III National Championships for the first time in history, recording a twelfth place finish. Describing the season, Carius explains how he allowed a sense of complacency to slip into the team. Having become confident in the routine that he had established, his willingness to let

team members “individualize” and do what was “right” for them was exploited. One way in which Carius and his staff began to get the program back on track was through “getting back to the basics” and the values of hard work, discipline, and a sense of selflessness that formed the foundation of its success. What is meant by this is that starting in 2006 the state of the program was critically examined resulting in a variety of changes. Both the hill and interval workouts were analyzed in regards to how each team member approached them and the morning run was made to be mandatory. Although it took a couple years, the team did eventually get back to its prior level of success. This resurgence was proven in 2008 when the team finished as the runners up at the National Championship and then again in 2009 when it was victorious.

Some of those who were instrumental in the rebuilding of the program during this time were the assistant coaches and alumni that Carius had learned to rely upon. Having held various positions at North Central, including stints as director of the physical education department and athletic director that did not end completely until 1993, Carius realizes how lucky he is to be able to focus solely on his coaching these days. One of the reasons that he is able to do this is because of the support of alumni and assistant coaches like Frank Gramarosso who came to North Central in 1983. The idea of hiring assistant coaches first came to Carius courtesy of former North Central football head coach and assistant athletic director Hank Guenther. Guenther had position coaches to help him and Carius thought that it was an idea he could also adopt. These days, because of assistant coaches who focus on different events and logistics, graduate assistants who are there to help with a variety of odd jobs, and recruiting directors who

20 Carius, supra n. 7.
look towards the future, Carius is given much more freedom. Also, due in large part to
the alumni who help to support the program financially, Carius doesn’t have to worry as
much about going out to fundraise and can focus his attention on the current team and the
aforementioned three workouts that make them great.

One notable individual who came through North Central’s cross country program
is 1996 alumni John Weigel. As an individual NCAA Division III Cross Country
National Champion, and two time runner up, Weigel tried to put into words his feelings
towards North Central’s principle workout, the hill:

We couldn’t yet see it, but we knew it was there. As we came closer, the
apprehensive feeling creeping into us much like darkness creeping into a
town as the sun goes down. Our heavy breathing was almost drowned out
by the silence – for we knew there was no turning back.
… As we headed up the grass trail and turned the bend we finally saw the
huge mountain that stood before us.
… I stared at that mountain in awe. It had its own personality. It had been
through so much. All existence seemed to fade away for a moment. I had
so much respect for the hill I couldn’t explain. It stood for perseverance,
determination, and heart. It seemed to contain all wisdom.
… We turned the corner to start up the hill – the first mile of a race. I
worked on pushing my body with my legs as hard as I could and getting to
the top as fast and as strong as I could. I knew in order to get the most out
of this hill; and to gain its respect I couldn’t let up.
… My head was throbbing, my chest pounding – my legs – arms shoulders
ached as I headed down again. I didn’t even care how loud I was
breathing now – I just wanted the pain to go away – but I couldn’t quit. It
showed no guts to quit now. What would that prove? I had more left. I
wasn’t finished with that damn hill.
… I turned the corner and headed up again.
… Not only were my current teammates boosting me, but the alums of the
past who conquered this hill boosted my soul. I had so many spirits
propelling me forward. I made it to the top of all of these things and
sprinted to the fence.
…I stood in amazement at the top of the hill as Al’s powerful words once
again filled me … he spoke of team, the feeling, and commitment. He
always seemed to say the right things. But these words weren’t just
words; they were feelings and they were reinforced by the spirit of the
hill.21

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21 John Weigel, *The Hill*, from the private collection of Al Carius.
Weigel was not alone in using his personal experience with the hill to help him describe the greater values that define the success of the North Central cross country program. Building on this, countless other alumni have expressed similar feelings towards the hill workout. Dale Keopnick and Ray Krauss, teammates on the 1982 national championship team, both heard about “the hill” before they ran one hill workout. Although Keopnick was originally frightened at what he heard about the hill, by his junior year he began to view the hill workout as something that separated the men from the boys.22 Krauss first heard of the hill the summer before his freshman year at North Central. Looking back, Krauss commented that one of the most important aspects of the hill workout was the mental strength that it developed, and as an athlete ran up the top of the hill, he experienced the worst pain he would ever feel while running.23 Pat Carney, a 1984 alumni and current volunteer assistant coach with the team, provided another account of how the hill was something that instilled the values of the program in the athletes. Carney explained how enduring such pain and suffering helped to fuse the team together in undeniable ways.24

An important thing to note though is that the hill that Weigel, Keopnick, Krauss, and Carney are referring to is a different hill than the one the team runs today. The reason for that is because in 1996 the Wednesday team hill workout was moved from the Four Lakes ski hill in Lisle to a hill at the Blackwell Forest Preserve in Wheaton due to complaints received about the team running on private property. Naturally, many alumni were uncomfortable with the switch. They felt as if the Four Lakes hill had served the

22 Dale Koepnick, interview from the collection of Al Carius, Naperville, IL, October 17, 2000.
24 Pat Carney, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, January 29, 2009.
team well for decades and because of that there was no real reason to move. An example of this can be seen through alumni Rob Harvey. Harvey initially argued that the workout at the Four Lakes ski hill was far more difficult than the workout at the hill in the Blackwell Forest Preserve. Although Harvey came around, both he and many alumni argue that it took a few years to get the same feeling at the hill at Blackwell Forest Preserve as there had been at the Four Lakes ski hill.

This point is further proven through an example including alumni Jon Macnider. A member of the 1975 and 1976 national championship teams, Macnider was stunned when a member of the team who ran their hill workouts at the Blackwell Forest Preserve described how the team drove to the hill. To this he replied that the current team was nothing but a bunch of wimps, and then went on to describe the route that his team use to take when they ran to the hill from school. It was during this description of the route that both parties realized that they were talking about different hills. This realization that neither could relate to the other’s experiences was something countless alumni and team members had already noticed. In many ways, this caused a disconnection between the generations that was so important in the program’s philosophy of building on the success of previous teams. Thus, in an attempt to provide a connecting link between the two hills and the subsequent runners who ran those hills, soil was taken from the Four Lakes ski hill and ceremonially placed at the top of the hill at the Blackwell Forest Preserve. Now, regardless of where they were running, the members of the current team where still conquering the same ground that had been conquered for decades before them by hundreds of runners.

25 Rob Harvey, interview from the collection of Al Carius, Naperville, IL, October 17, 2000.
Even if the hill workout is one that is pointed to the most by alumni, there is another workout that has even deeper roots in the success of the program. Although it is changed not only in its makeup but also in when it is completed over the years, the importance of the Monday interval workout at Lincoln Park in Naperville cannot be overlooked. Simply put, an interval workout can be run at a variety of distances. Most important though is the fact that after each interval the runner takes time to recover before starting the next interval. What made interval workouts a great fit for North Central’s cross country team was the fact that all runners could be completing the same workout at the same place regardless of how fast they were. Citing the importance of this, alumni Glen Behnke gave an example of his first workout with the team in 1970, saying that one time he was:

Doing a run down Hobson Road and I remember busting down Hobson and it was a long run coming down Chicago (Avenue) back to the college and it’s a hot day … and I’m sitting there trying to run with these guys not knowing the course and I realize that the second tier guys are a long way behind me so I’ve got to stay (with the lead group). I remember when I got to Chicago Avenue I was really in trouble and they circled (back) for me and as a group came back and said, “Good job.” And I was in a world of hurt and there’s nobody behind me but they knew I was going to be a factor (in the top seven) and I’d been accepted into the group like, “Oh yeah Glen, come on over. You did good.” I was in trouble there at the end, but they circled for me just right and we cooled down there at the end the last mile or two.\(^{26}\)

Although Behnke was lucky to be good enough to stay in contact with that lead group, many of other runners would not have been so fortunate. Lincoln Park did and still does provide a place where all team members, regardless of ability, can come together and work out as a team. After a short three or five mile warm up, determined by one’s fitness, team members are broken into smaller

\(^{26}\) Glen Behnke, interview from the collection of Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, October 17, 2000.
groups based on ability level. Koepnick again provided valuable insight in regards to the power of the park and these groups as he described how the team would build camaraderie during Lincoln Park workouts. In the beginning of the season, the workout consisted of four one-mile repeats with a minute and a half recovery time between intervals. As the weeks went on, the recovery time would be increased until halfway through the season when the interval distance would change from four mile repeats to six half mile repeats. At this time the recovery time would also decrease back down to a minute and a half, but again would work its way back up as the season started to finish up and the amount of half mile repeats was reduced.

The reason that such a workout would build camaraderie is because the shorter distances allowed teammates who might be separated by a minute or more in a five mile race to run within seconds of one another during a one mile or half mile interval. This lesson of working hard, but not necessarily racing your teammates all out in practice was something that was passed down from upperclassmen to the younger athletes in an attempt to teach them how to best prepare themselves for the National Championship meet at the end of November. Also because the intervals were literally run at a park, there was the advantage of practicing on a terrain that was similar to what one would see during a cross country race. Todd Radecky, a member of the team in the early 1990s, stated “I
cardiovascular wise, it had more to do with our minds and that is what helps on Saturday (during a meet).”  

In addition, the team morning run is another principle of the cross country program at North Central that has helped to instill the team with the values that have led to its success both on and off the course. Radecky described how he felt that the morning run built the core of the team. He spoke to the psychological benefits of completing a morning run every day of the week. Building on this, 2006 alumni Nick Hird explained how the simple act of making the commitment to get out of bed and be on the morning run was what was important for building team values and chemistry. It was the cold days, where people allow themselves to have an excuse to stay in bed that truly showed the chemistry of the team and indicated which athletes were committed and which ones were not. Derron Bishop, a sophomore on the 1990 team, would stand in front of the whole team after a cold morning when half of the team skipped morning run and say, “Get your ass out there! You are missing half the day’s workout if you are not out there!”

The idea of the team doing a morning run each and every morning stems from Behnke. After staying with the lead group during his first workout in the fall of 1970, he had started to develop into a very good runner. Behnke was always looking for ways to get better, and when he realized that Carius ran on his own in the morning, he started joining him on a consistent basis in the spring of

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27 Todd Radecky, interview from the collection of Al Carius, Naperville, IL, October 5, 2000.
28 Radecky, supra n. 24.
29 Nick Hird, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 3, 2009.
30 Derron Bishop, interview from the collection of Al Carius, Naperville, IL, October 29, 2000.
1971. As Behnke’s career at North Central continued, he developed into an extremely recognized runner whose accolades included a third place finish in the 1972 NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championship, a second place finish in the 1973 NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championship, and a first place finish in the 1974 NCAA Division III Outdoor Track and Field six mile race. Other runners on the team soon began to take note and began getting up for morning run themselves in the hope that they too could get a taste of the success Behnke had experienced.

As the morning run continued to grow though, the team had to set some parameters as to how it was run. Given that the primary purpose of the morning run was to open up through a controlled aerobic run, the team learned to run the morning run relatively slow, at a pace where the very slowest runner on the team could run stride for stride with the fastest member of the team. One year in which this approach to morning run was threatened was 1980. At this point in time the team was extremely young, with a roster that contained eighteen freshmen.³¹ Adding to the confusion was the fact that the team lacked the leadership of Carius and other upperclassmen. Due to the fact that he had been involved in a car accident, Carius was unable to run with the team in the mornings. Complicating things more was the fact that one returning all American moved off campus and completed morning run on his own, while the other returning all American was diagnosed with a heart problem and unable to run. Without a set leadership structure, the team started running morning run faster just so that they could get

³¹ Krauss, supra n. 20.
back to their dorm room sooner. After a disappointing seventh place finish at the 1980 NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championship that fall, new leaders emerged the following fall who helped reestablish order within the team.

Although they are three completely different entities, what the hill workout, the interval workout, and the morning run all have in common is that they link current team members with alumni who have paved the way before them, and through the success that alumni have had doing the same things, they provide current team members with a confidence that is in many ways distinct to North Central. National Champion and 2000 alumni Tim McCoskey commented on the positive results that the long term approach of these three principles has provided:

The difference between North Central and programs that have success for a couple of years or five to ten years is that we don’t chance philosophy. We don’t depend on talent. I think there’s a lot of talented teams out there. Every year there is a team with just as much talent as us. What I think we do better than any other team in the nation, Division I, II, or III, is develop talent. We are building through the year. We are pointing toward November. We have the luxury of that. We are not training for Conference. We are not training for Regionals. So we know we are at our best in November. That is where the tradition comes in. That is the luxury tradition afford us. It is the confidence. The team feeling, which stems from tradition, is that everyone is out there competing for one another.

The tradition of success that this provides the team meshes almost perfectly with the philosophy of Carius and the cross country team of simply, “Run for fun and personal bests.” Carius describes this team philosophy by citing an example of something his former coach at the University of Chicago Track Club, Ted Haydon, said to Jim Ryun at the 1968 Olympics. When walking to the 1500 meter start line, Ryun asked Haydon to

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32 Koepnick, supra n. 19.
33 Tim McCoskey, interview from the collection of Al Carius, Naperville, IL, October 20, 2000.
say a prayer for him. Haydon responded by saying, “I’ll save my prayer for something important.” To Carius, there could not be a better way to describe what he is doing. He believes that there is more to life than running. The expectation of the program is not to produce Olympic gold medalists, but rather to have young men maximize their God-given talent. The fun part of running then comes when you see yourself get better.34

Along with the fun in seeing oneself get better, Carius explained that fun can and should be a part of the process in making oneself better as well. Take for instance the previously mentioned team morning run. In addition to instilling the values already mentioned, morning run has also evolved into something team members look to with excitement. From the time the morning run begins, when Carius joins the team by the driveway at the back of the fieldhouse, there is not a moment when one team member is not addressing the rest of the team. So many traditions and rituals have been accumulated from different teams through the years that few new traditions or rituals seem likely to be added, unless one of the older traditions is dropped. McCoskey described morning run as a time for goofing around. Everyone understands that the running is important for becoming a better runner, but they also understand that the most difficult part of the morning run is getting out of bed. McCoskey summed up his feelings for the uniqueness of the morning run by saying:

What other team in the nation has the Secret Word of the Day, the Mr. Temperature Contest, Alumni Trivia, and We Get Up Songs? Your freshman year you do not even know what to think. It all just seems goofy. I would hate to see what one of the big schools we compete against would do if one of their guys (athletes) came on morning run (with North Central). It is fun to let loose and not worry about what people think.35

34 Carius, supra n. 7.
35 McCoskey, supra n. 30.
Upon arriving at North Central, Carius was well aware that, “At least in the beginning, running is neither easy nor enjoyable. You need great motivation and personal discipline to survive the first 3 months.” 36 With this idea in mind, Carius moved forward intent on getting through the cross country season (the first 3 months) with a core group of individuals around which he could then form the foundation of his team. Although the first season was at times a struggle, Carius was reminded of his ultimate goal by the personal note he kept from his role model John Wooden that expressed Wooden’s philosophy that, “Success is peace of mind that is the direct result of self-satisfaction of knowing you did your best.” 37 It is said that a, “coach’s overall philosophy is made up of interrelated components of one’s personal philosophy of life.” 38 In regards to the cross country program at North Central, this is surely the case.

It is no accident that the values previously identified by Carius and described by alumni are the most important part of what they have taken away from their time here at North Central. Maintaining these values as an intricate part of the program, while getting through his first three months struggle was no easy task. To this, Carius was a living example of the value of teamwork that he taught to the young men on his team. Given the close proximity, it is not surprising that Carius formed a friendship with Elmhurst (York) High School coach Joe Newton, whose cross country teams have won 25 Illinois state championships. The reason that this friendship is important in explaining the values seen at North Central is because it was through Carius’s collaboration with Newton that he was not only able to become more confident in the values he was already instilling in

his team, but he also was able to pick up on some of Newton’s values. Seeing Newton’s core values of, “being the best you can be, working hard for what you get, and treating others as you want them to treat you,” one can see the importance of such a friendship.39

Having seen how Carius developed and helped maintain the values of his program at North Central, there still is a question of how he introduces these values to each new generation that comes through the program. For prospective athletes on Carius’s team, the tone is set from the beginning when the athlete meets with Carius on a recruiting visit at his office in the stadium. For current athletes, their trips to the office simply reiterate what was experienced the first time they stepped into this space. From the series of framed All-American certificates, to the wooden plaque that reads, “North Central College Cross Country National Champions” and has a series of wooden pieces connected to it each with a national championship year on it, to the pictures that decorate the walls, everything contributes to the story that portrays the values and traditions of success that have been built at North Central College from one generation of runners to the next.

The bonds that are evident by looking at these pictures though did not happen by accident and it was through the hard work of Carius early on that helped to instill in upperclassmen the obligation they have of passing the values of the program along to underclassmen. All too often research done on successful teams focuses solely on what the coach does. Yet it is when the coach is able to pass what is typically seen as his or her job of instilling team values in underclassmen to upperclassmen, that the team truly has grasped what is important. Koepnick specifically remembers a time soon after the

team had returned from Christmas break and many of the members of his class were not
training particularly hard. An upperclassmen by the name of Steve Jawar got all the
freshman together and, referring to morning run, simply told them, “All right, you guys
have gotten through cross country season, none of you guys are freshmen anymore. I
expect to see a whole lot more out of you guys from here on out.”40 Koepnick took the
message to heart and from that January to cross country nationals the following
November worked to improve himself from the number twelve runner on the team to the
number five runner, illustrating the influence and positive power that an upperclassman
can have on a younger teammate.

Although Jawar’s talk to the freshman was more informal, there are some more
formal ways in which the upperclassmen on North Central’s team pass values on to
younger teammates. One great example is the big brother program. Each August, every
incoming freshmen is assigned an upperclassmen big brother. Even though all
upperclassmen are there to watch out for all freshmen, by specifically pairing team
members together, each new freshmen receives sincere and extensive guidance from his
big brother before he even steps on campus. Whether it is simply calling to check up on
a little brother and make sure they are doing ok and don’t have any questions over the
summer, helping a little brother move in, or doing a variety of other things, the big
brother program is imperative to the success of North Central’s freshmen. Getting back
to the example of Jawar sitting the freshman down after Christmas break though, it was
not the only time when the team followed the leadership of upperclassmen and began to
take ownership of the program upon a return back to school in January. In something
that really shows the character of the men who run for North Central, there have been

40 Koepnick, supra n. 19.
multiple occasions where team members have literally dug out a snow covered track so that they could run repeats on it in the middle of the winter, not letting anything stand in their way.

If the morning run really did play such a large role in Koepnick’s improvement, why would McCoskey have said he would hate to see what guys from big schools thought of the activities on the team morning run? The reason is because the culture and values on teams at big schools is often quite different than that seen at North Central and NCAA Division III athletics. The NCAA Division III philosophy statement states:

Colleges and universities in NCAA Division III place highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students’ academic programs. They seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete’s athletic activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete’s educational experience, and in which coaches play a significant role as educators. They also seek to establish and maintain an environment that values cultural diversity and gender equity among their student-athletes and athletics staff.41

When one compares what is described here to what is seen in NCAA Division I, its like comparing apples to oranges. In the mid-1980s NCAA Division IA began to track the graduation rates of athletes and students at large at all of its institutions and publicize this information. This policy was being called for by individuals both from within and outside the NCAA who wanted to hold the schools accountable. Although there was nothing specifically outlined in the policy that would punish schools with low graduation rates, the idea was that if schools knew the information was going to be publicized, that would be enough motivation to improve low graduation rates in and of itself. Unfortunately, “a recent NCAA study found that while the overall graduation rate for

Division IA males athletes was 58 percent, ‘only 41 percent of male basketball players in Division IA graduated [within six years of entry], the lowest rate since 1985 … ; and 51 percent of football players graduated, also the lowest since the class entering in 1985.’’

Points like this can be even reiterated more so when looking at specific conferences within both NCAA Division I and Division III. Take for instance the Southwest Conference of Division I. Former NCAA Executive Director Walter Byers was warned that, “Southwest Conference recruiting was a cesspool.”\(^4\) One specific coach, Ron Meyer of Southern Methodist University (SMU), “would sit down and the youngster would sit down. Meyer would then pull out a plumb money clip and peel off a hundred-dollar bill. He would get up, walk to a nearby bulletin board, pin up the C-note, and announce: ‘Young man, this is my calling card.’”\(^4\) With a head coach like this, and boosters who would do all they could to bribe prospects, it is no wonder that SMU had an entire season of competition cancelled by the NCAA.

Part of the reason that this would never been seen specifically on Carius’s North Central team though is because something such as this goes against everything a Division III institution represents. Regardless of the fact that Division III colleges do not offer scholarships, the values of the colleges are also in different places. John Sawyer, the original chair of the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) Presidents’ Conference Committee described the basic philosophy of the conference as, “‘The largest feasible participation in a wide variety of sports well coached by high-quality people who remain genuinely interested in the students’ personal growth and


\(^44\) Ibid., 19.
genuinely mindful of the educational goals of the enterprise.’ ”  ...think that certain NCAA Division III schools, specifically in this case NESCAC school Williams College, go too far in the opposite direction. The case being referred to here occurred in May of 1996. In this case, the Williams College women’s lacrosse team, despite having gone undefeated during the regular season, was not playing in the national tournament. The reasoning was simple. In coherence with the rules of the conference, the Williams administration had turned down the invitation because the tournament took place at the same time as final exams. The women were quick to find out that the priorities of the college and the conference were not in athletics.

Because it is a NCAA Division III institution, North Central’s academic policies are on par with the other Division III institutions mentioned, not Division I. Thus Carius’s emphasis on values is much stronger because North Central is behind him as an institution. As someone who has had a plethora of success, Carius has had the opportunity to leave North Central and coach elsewhere at a Division I institution such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison. What then would prevent Carius from leaving for Division I where successful coaches these days often make well over $1 million annually? The reason was that Carius knew full well that if he went to a school like that, his role as a coach would change. His expectation as a coach at a Division I institution would emphasize results much more than producing quality young men and specifically, sticking with the value of education, quality students. A telling quotation in the Chronicle of Higher Education noted:

46 James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen, xvi.
47 Walter Byers, 10.
On college campuses, professors and coaches walk across the same lawns and eat the same cafeteria food. They interact with the same students, but not often with each other. Coaches typically shun highfalutin academic presentations, and professors hardly attend superfluous athletic events – unless the team is good and they happen to be fans. The segregation arises from a culture clash that has made those in the academic worlds forget that whether they are teaching students how to throw a softball or analyze an ancient Greek text, they are doing the same thing.48

Carius stayed at North Central because of what people like Lauri Hamen, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Athletics and Student Affairs, described as things specific to not only NCAA Division III but also to North Central. Contrary to a complete separation between the academic and athletic worlds seen in NCAA Division I, at Division III schools these lines are often blurred. Take for instance what is happening at North Central. Hamen describes that at one time, there might have been a sort of imaginary line, that divided the campus at Chicago Avenue. Although she notes this line would not have been nearly as thick as one on a Division I campus, certain faculty members held the same stereotypes about the athletes at North Central that were previously described as fitting some Division I athletes and their respective programs. To break down this wall, North Central introduced the idea of faculty mentors. This concept, something Hamen says she read about an East Coast school she does not even remember the name of doing, brought some of those same people who held the stereotypes about collegiate athletics and allowed them to see firsthand the quality individuals who represented North Central College. At the same time, coaches were able to see that the faculty who some had thought so little of, were in fact true sports fans after all.

As a result of this concept, whenever a football recruit comes on a campus visit, he is met by the football faculty mentor. Thus, from their first steps on campus a football player is sent a message that here academics are important. Similarly, when the baseball faculty mentor is seen hitting ground balls to the team or the cross country faculty mentor is seen at cross country team meetings, it sends a message to the athletes that not only are they expected to do well in the classroom, but that there are people at the college that are there to support their athletics. Potentially even more important is the fact that North Central’s coaches are expected to teach.49 Although this is seen in a few NCAA Division III colleges, it is just another reason how the message of the importance of a quality education is sent to North Central student athletes. Then, because of their experience teaching, when coaches speak to their students about the value of education it is not perceived as something that is simply all talk.

Having focused on the difference between NCAA Division I and III academically speaking, the question of what additional values are present at small liberal arts colleges that would help to further enhance education and allow Carius to establish the program like he did remains. To begin, one has to go no farther than the word small and realize the impact that size has at a liberal arts college. The book *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts Colleges* described how during the time between World War I and World War II universities and liberal arts colleges really began to separate from one another. An increase in students made universities much larger (from 7,000 in 1920 to 10,000 in 1930 at the University of Wisconsin), something that administrators at those schools were happy to see. Yet even though such increases in students did bring about legislative support and an additional tuition income, such increases also brought cries of

49 Lauri Hamen, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 13, 2009.
impersonality and no clear mission. At the same time, liberal arts colleges stood their
ground and held firm to their belief that small size promoted a sense of community that
would develop a student’s mind, body, and spirit in a way that larger universities could not.50

Such a view is shared by Carius and other members of the North Central College faculty. On a regular basis, Carius reminds his cross country runners that their minds, bodies, and spirits are gifts that are to be cultivated. Dean of Students at North Central, Gary Ireland, spoke to this idea by saying, “the Administrative structure of larger
colleges naturally prevents a personal feel that can aid in impressing values on students.
In order to even attempt to instill values somewhere with a large student population, these
institutions are forced to do things through programs rather than through relationship
building.”51 Ireland’s description of how size helps liberal arts colleges, “commitment to
their central education mission,” was also reiterated by North Central President Harold
Wilde and Assistant Dean for Student Life Kimberly Sluis.52

Wilde spoke to the fact that he saw great similarities between what North Central
tries to do as a Division III liberal arts college and what Carius attempts to do. One
example that Wilde highlighted was the fact that although a lot of hard work goes into
become a good cross country runner, the hard work often provides little glory other than
the improvement that a runner sees within himself. He applied this same concept to
North Central. Although there might not be a parade for someone who receives an A in a
class, the glory comes in committing yourself to being the best student you can be. In

51 Gary Ireland, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 12, 2009.
addition to the value of hard work bringing rewards, Wilde also highlighted such values as honesty and how cutting corners at a cross country practice will catch up to you at a meet just as cutting corners in class will catch up to students. Wilde added that given his role as President of North Central he is often asked to speak to various leadership classes. He stated that he loves, “to use the cross country team example because it captures something fundamental to great leadership.” Complimenting Wilde, Sluis also reiterated the points made by Ireland. She noted that in the process of hiring a new hall director for North Central, the focus is not solely on a candidate’s administrative skills as it often is at larger institutions. Rather, a school like North Central places great value on the personality of a hall director and what their ability will be to get to know students and thus shape their values in accordance with those of the college.

All of these values do what is referred to as preparing one to live, not make a living. They prepare students to be well rounded, something CEOs say they look for time and time again. This is also done in large part through the collaborative work done at liberal arts colleges. Although the scope of this collaborative work varies, the idea that it exists at all is vastly different from larger schools where faculty are often too busy with their own research to collaborate significantly with students. For example, through the reward structures in place at liberal arts colleges faculty are provided incentives that focus on teaching. Given the fact that undergraduates are the focus of a liberal arts college, it is only natural that faculty are hired and rewarded for their ability to teach this population. Oftentimes, many professors earn their bachelors degrees at liberal arts

53 Harold Wilde, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 12, 2009.
55 Kimberly Sluis, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 13, 2009.
56 Steven Koblik and Stephen R. Graubard, 189.
colleges themselves. Because of this, and the experience that they had, it is not
uncommon for them to return to a similar sort of small liberal arts college to teach.
Although the pay may be lower and the opportunities for research fewer, it is a belief is
belief in what liberal arts colleges do that help them to make this decision.57 The book
Teaching in the Small Colleges sums this idea up well by stating:

As enthusiasm for the teaching of values grows in virtually every quarter of higher education, teachers and administrators at many small colleges may well entertain feelings of satisfaction. After all, value development has been an explicit goal of many small colleges since their founding. Indeed, isn’t the primary virtue of a small institution its potential for creating community, for developing personal acquaintance between students and teachers and providing both with support as they question, refine, and live out value commitments?58

Having examined the history of the growth and success of the North Central cross country team through the contextualization of the college and other NCAA Division III liberal arts institutions, one question still needs to be analyzed. How and why has the cross country team at North Central been able to experience this success if the values instilled on the athletes should be very similar to those at other liberal arts college that compete in NCAA Division III athletics? The simple fact of the matter is that Carius’s success stems from his ability to do this better than anyone else. To prove this point, one has to look no farther than other sports teams at North Central. When comparing North Central’s current streak of thirty-six consecutive conference cross country titles to the eight won by the men’s baseball team or worse yet, three won by the men’s basketball team, one has to acknowledge that the only real differences between the two teams is the

57 David W. Breneman, 5.
coaching staff and the players that this coaching staff recruits.\textsuperscript{59} For all three teams are sponsored by North Central to play in NCAA Division III. Thus, if that was the sole factor of the cross country team’s success it should be replicated by these teams as well.

With all of his accolades, it is no surprise that Carius considers it hard to say what the most memorable events have been over the years. Yet he expresses that his relationships with his athletes have been the most memorable experiences. Since “each team has its own chemistry,” Carius feels it would be unfair to narrow his forty-four years at North Central to a few main seasons or events.\textsuperscript{60} More important than all of these facts about winning and losing to Carius is what the men that have gone through the cross country program have done after they have graduated. It should come as no surprise that the largest group of men have gone on to be coaches and teachers themselves. Currently 170 alumni have gone on to teach and coach cross country from the smallest of junior high schools all the way on through the University of Illinois. One specific example of one of the many “mini” North Central programs is that established by 1994 alumni Dan Iverson. Currently a history and literature teacher at Naperville North High School, Iverson has led his girls cross country team to three state championships.

More importantly, Iverson states that he has taken what he learned from North Central from Carius, in which, “Running was … a metaphor. Hard work and team became the driving virtues of our lives, and the relationships we developed came to mean more than


\textsuperscript{60} Carius, \textit{supra} n. 7.
any particular pace or time that we might have individually achieved.”61 Referring to Thoreau’s *Walden* experience:

> I went into the woods because I wanted to live deliberately.  
> I wanted to live deep and suck the marrow out of life.  
> To put to route all that was not life,  
> and not when I had come to die,  
> discovered that I had not lived.62

Iverson explains that he, “‘went to the woods’ with Al for four years in the early ’90s and I emerged a better person, with an honest sense of what is truly important in life.”63

Kevin Rafferty, North Central class of 2001 said it best when he stated:

> When an individual stops competing for himself and starts competing for the team, of both current athletes as well as alumni, that is when the team is able to achieve real success.64

As has already been discussed in great detail, the real success that the team has become accustom to achieving has come in a variety of forms, yet at the same time, it has always looked the same. The reason for this is because from 1968 on through today, whenever the team competes at the national meet, they have looked the same wearing their red and white candy cane striped uniforms. What is unique about the uniform is that there is no writing or symbol on it to indicate that it belongs to North Central College. Rather, it is simply through the success of the athletes who have worn it in the past that it is recognized as being distinctly North Central College.

> From their beginnings, the candy cane striped uniform served as the team’s regular, every meet uniform. In 1986 though, the company that made the uniforms went out of business and Carius had trouble locating another company that would be able to

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63 Dan Iverson, 20.  
64 Kevin Raferty, interview by Dan Buys, Naperville, IL, February 2, 2009.
produce a similar uniform to replace old ones when the got worn out. To solve this
problem, it was decided that the team would try to preserve the candy cane striped
uniforms by only wearing them for the Conference, Regional, and National meet each
year. An immediate consequence of this decision was that in order for someone to wear
“the stripes” they would have to earn the right as all three of these meets typically fall at
the end of the season in the month of November. Naturally, this process of having to
earn your stripes increases meaning in them to the runners. To help better understand
this, it is best to again look at the words of Weigel, who explains how the striped jerseys
that the team wears best symbolize everything that the team, the coaching staff, NCAA
Division III athletics, and North Central as a liberal arts institution represent:

A combination of this attitude, passion, commitment, support and tradition
make North Central cross country the special thing that it is today. There
are no secrets to why we are so dominant and successful, and there are no
words to describe why it is so special – But something can be said of the
magic of the stripes. When you put on those stripes at the end of the
season, you are putting on a legacy. They represent everything I have
talked about. You are putting on every race and practice that has ever
been run at North Central. Your are putting on every experience that has
ever been learned at North Central. In fact – you are a part of ever person
that has ever been a part of this program at North Central. You will feel
all of this when you put on those stripes. Now you can call it tradition,
you can call it superstition, you can all it the way the material feels on
you, and you may even call it a bunch of bull. But I call it magic – and
soon – you will too.65

65 John Weigel, *Behind the Stripes*, from the private collection of Al Carius.
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