

Recap of the Commerce Boys' 2023 Outdoor Season

It was the best of seasons - it was the worst of seasons!

It was the best of seasons! It was the largest team assembled since the start of the modern Commerce track team in 2003 and it was one of the most diverse teams we ever had in regards to having athletes from all grades, from multiple co-op schools and diversity of athletes who excelled in sprinting, distance, throws and jumps. It began to look like upwards of 4 or more school records could be broken this season. It was the best of seasons. But...

It was the worst of seasons! With that many athletes, many came with no track & field experience and when certain athletes began to show signs of brilliance in particular events, coaching - good coaching - would be necessary to help them become capable, confident and competitive. But we were never given the opportunity.

For many years access to the lone track and field facility in Springfield was limited. There were simply too many athletes from too many schools to all be using the Howard Drew Track at Central safely at the same time. So 3 schools would use the track at a time (which was still too many) and that limited every school to just 3 days per week of track access.

Whereas Central could simply walk out of their building and Sci-Tech and Putnam could take minute walk across the street, Commerce was reliant on a school bus to Central. The bus was scheduled to arrive at 2:45pm but usually got to the school at 3pm and so it was usually by 3:15 that the Commerce team arrived at the track - which was 45 minutes later than the other high schools.

But it gets worse. This year boys and girls Lacrosse teams were using the Central infield for practices and games and the Drew Track was in near constant use for dual meets. So all schools were made to leave the track early for practices, and the order of meet events were changed (so as not be be compliant with the NFHS track & field rules, so meets would finish earlier. The result was that for our 3 days of track access, two of those days we had only about 20 minutes of track time before we were ushered off the track and during dual meets our athletes never had sufficient time to recover between events!



The results were not unexpected. Insufficient warm-up at practices and insufficient recovery times during meets resulted in an abundance of injuries.

Our dual meet record was 3-1-1 with a "tie" the result of not being allowed to finish our dual meet against Putnam (due to Lacrosse needing the infield for warmup an hour before their game!).

Despite all the disadvantages thrown at the team, we had extraordinary performances from Joshua Reyes in the Shot Put, Julio Ramos in the Javelin Throw, Shaheem Shabazz in the Triple Jump and Chase Johnson in the Long Jump. Any one of them could have broken the existing School Record under more favorable practice and meet conditions.

Commerce boys are known for being a top contender in the 4x100 Relay every year. Many schools have great relays for a few years and then fade away but Commerce is *always* in the mix. Some years are better than others, but in 19 years of coaching the relays, we have only failed three times to make it to the MIAA State Divisional Championships and 8 of our relays moved on to the All-States Meet of Champions!



In almost any of the years past, losing one of the fastest members of the relay in the middle or towards the end of the season would be a disaster because the alternate would never have the speed or passing skills to fill the gap. This season we were losing relay members left and right. Sometimes the injury healed in time for the athlete to get back into the A-Relay but other times there was simply not enough time to heal.

But our depth of sprinters and the passing skills they honed allowed us to make it to State Divisionals while missing our best sprinter. When a second, very important member of the relay sustained an injury at the PVIAC Western Mass. Division 1 Championships a week before Divisionals we STILL had a very capable team to run at Divisionals - which allowed us to move up from our seed position - and to prove without a doubt that Putnam is NOT faster than Commerce, despite their "fantasy" seed time.



Under better circumstances the Commerce Boys' team would have done better. I'm sure School Records would have been broken, more points in dual meets and Invitational meets would have been scored and more Personal Records would have been set, but under these extraordinary circumstances, almost every athlete on the team excelled. They gave it their all and many competed in spite injury and supported their teammates when they couldn't. Many talented athletes will be back next year and I'm confident records will fall, the team will grow and Commerce will continue to have the best Track & Field program in the city. - *Coach Larry*