

John Marshall Rockets

Track & Field

2021



Hello JM Track and Field Family,

The start of the 2021 season is fast approaching and with it comes a host of questions about what things will look like and how competing in a COVID-19 pandemic environment will affect practices and meets. To help both the newcomer and experienced athlete navigate a constantly changing landscape, here are some questions and answers to help everyone have a great experience as a Rocket.

Before beginning the Q&A, here is some information about me and the coaching staff:

My name is Mike Sonnabend and I am the head coach for the boys track and field program at John Marshall. I have been with the program since 2011 and have served as head coach since 2014. In the fall I am head coach for the boy's cross-country team. On Friday, I got tapped as the girl's head coach due to a recent resignation. I was not expecting this but happy to help both programs. For the girls in our program, please be patient until I get up to speed.

My roots with JM are deep. I graduated from JM, am married, and have three Rocket boys. Sam graduated in 2017 and was a member of the track, cross country, and swim team. Nick is a senior and pole vaults. Andrew is a sophomore and like Sam competes in track, cross country, and swimming. When not at the track I teach Developmental Adapted Physical Education for Rochester Public Schools.

We have great coaches in both programs. The coaches for the boys have been together for seven years. Dan Feda is our distance coach and also is an assistant for cross country. Justin Rein is an assistant working with jumps and hurdles. Our throws coach is currently in progress. Our girl's program is rebuilding with a solid core of coaches. Dakota Hiller just completed her first year as head coach for cross country and will be coaching our distance runners. Nolan Fox will guide the girl sprinters with help from Mikaela Raddatz. We share a throws coach, so like the boy's, this position is in progress.

Now on the Q&A:

Q: This is my first year going out for the track team. Do I have to try out and possibly get cut from the team?

A: Welcome to the JM Rocket Track & Field Team. We do not have tryouts and do not cut people from the team. There are eighteen events in high school track and field, so there is a place for everyone.

Q: When does practice start and what should I bring?

A: The first day of practice is Monday, March 29 at 3:00. We will start at the stadium with a team meeting and then break into event groups. Dress for the weather and bring a water bottle. We will not be able to use the locker rooms to store items, so you may want to bring a backpack or bag to put extra clothing, food, or other items in.

Q: Will practice times remain at 3:00?

A: Practice times will most likely be moved to 3:30 once school begins on April 5. This is due to teacher schedules and the ability of coaches to get to JM.

Q: How long is a practice?

A: The length of a practice depends on the event group and the workout taking place. In general, most practices will be done before 5:30. Distance runners vary the most with longer runs and workouts off site taking the most time. If you need to leave by a specific time, talk to your event coach before practice.

Q: Do we practice on Saturday?

A: Practice days are determined by the event coach. If you are a distance runner plan to practice on Saturday. This is usually the only time to get a long run in. Sprinters and throwers occasionally practice on Saturday, but it is usually a small group working on something specific. If an event coach plans a Saturday practice it will be communicated in advance and does count towards attendance.

Q: I will be coming to practice from John Adams, how do I get to practice?

A: The school district is working on an activity bus for middle school students. We will let you know when a decision is made. The bus will only be for students at John Adams, not Friedell or Lincoln at Mann.

Q: How do I know what event group to start with?

A: Choose a group you are most interested in. The event groups are sprints/jumps, distance, and throws. Keep in mind you will experience more than one event within your event group. For example, the sprint/jumps group covers 100m, 200m, 400m, hurdles, relays, long jump, triple jump, and pole vault. Distance covers 800m, 1600m, 3200m, and 4x800m relay. Throwers cover the shot put and discus.

Q: Do I have to stay with the group I chose on day one?

A: No. Most kids have a general idea of what group may be best for them, but there is always some movement taking place. We try to limit movement the further we get into the season due to training concerns. It will take a while to figure out what event is best for you. Our general rule is it will take our staff up to three years to figure out what event is the best fit for each athlete. A lot can happen in the span of a track and field career.

We have had sprinters move to distance, distance runners become jumpers, hurdlers become pole vaulters, and kids who just do jumps. We have had distance runners on our 4x400m relay and once had a sprinter move to throws and ended up going to State. There is also movement within each event group. Someone interested in just the 100m may end up just running 400m. Distance

runners bounce around within their group and may end up running just 800m or do both the 1600m and 3200m. Sprinters forget about hurdles, but after trying them end up staying. One last dramatic example. Shortly before Coach Sonnabend started as an assistant coach, JM had a 200m State Champion that played center for the football team. Who would have thought that was possible? This same kid ended up running for the University of Minnesota in the 400m.

Q: When do we have meets and do I need to get excused from school?

A: The schedule for boys and girls are posted on the team websites and also can be found at Big9.org. Although these schedules are considered official, they should still be considered tentative. Out of town meets usually involve getting excused from school. Bus times will be posted once they are finalized by the activity's office. To get excused, simply have a parent contact the attendance office to ensure you are not counted absent. A list of team members attending the meet will also be sent to the attendance office by the head coach. The bus will first stop at JA and then JM.

Q: How long is a meet and what should I bring?

A: One area track and field needs to work on is becoming more fan friendly. Track meets can be long. Allow up to three hours for a triangle or quad meet. Bigger invites and the conference and section meets can take all day. For this reason (no matter the type of meet) bring clothes for changing weather. It's not uncommon for the temperature to drop during a meet and become uncomfortable if not prepared. Also, keep in mind that we will not be allowed to bring a team tent, so we will be exposed the entire meet to rain and wind. Also, bring food to snack on or eat when done competing. Concession stands will not be open. As always, bring a filled water bottle. Some kids do bring homework for the bus ride and down time.

Q: What about my uniform and spirit wear?

A: The two program approach uniforms in different ways. Boys buy their uniform and keep it. This uniform is good season to season and for cross country. The link to buy a uniform is on the team site and must be ordered by Monday April 5. Spirit wear such as sweatshirts, pants, t-shirt, and jacket are optional and also due at the same time uniforms are. The girl's handout uniforms. This will be done shortly before the first meet. A spirit wear store will be set up soon after consulting with the team captains.

Q: What about shoes? What kind of shoes do I need for practice and meets?

A: For practice, simply wear a comfortable pair of shoes for running. These do not have to be expensive, but should be in good repair. If shoes show wear they may cause injury over time. It is also nice to have an extra pair in case they get wet and do not dry overnight. Spikes are optional but helpful. Some kids wait to purchase spikes until they decide to commit to track. When shopping, you will find a variety of specialty spikes including, sprinting, middle distance, long distance, and jumps. At our level the type of spikes is not critical. Go with something you like and look cool. I have one son who pole vaults and wears a distance shoe because he wants more heel cushion. My other son will be wearing cross country spikes for distance events. If you shop in town, Terra Loco and Rogan's shows offers a discount if you mention you run for John Marshall. Note: Throwers do have special shoes without spikes.

Q: What happens if I cannot be at practice and who do I contact?

A: We expect everyone to be at every practice. That being said, we are aware that sometimes things come up that interfere with practice. For this reason, we keep our attendance policy simple. First, all absences except illness and a family emergency are considered unexcused. We allow six absences for any reason as long as it is communicated in writing by a parent or teacher. The easiest way to do this is to send a message to the head coach through the team website. Absences without documentation result in missing the next meet. After reaching six absences the athlete is disqualified from competing in upcoming meets.

Q: How do I know if a practice or meet is canceled or there is new information?

A: The fastest way to get information on the boy's program is to sign-up for our Remind.com text service. This gives you access to information as it happens. The team website will also be updated. The girl's program will have the Remind.com text service soon.

Q: How can I letter in track and field?

A: Lettering standards for the boys are performance based and posted on the team website under the standards tab. They are meant to be challenging and a source of accomplishment when reached. It is our hope that wearing a track letter is a source of pride and lets others know it was earned. The standards for girls have been calculated differently and will be posted after talking with the captains.

Q: Will COVID-19 play a factor in this year's track and field experience?

A: COVID-19 has affected every part of our lives over the past year and high school sports are no exceptions. Pandemic guidelines will affect how we practice and compete, but the overall experience should stay intact. We are fortunate to have sport that takes place outside. The cross-country season went pretty well and I expect the track experience to be similar. Once everyone understands what is expected, everything should fall in place. Masks are required when arriving for practice, but can be taken off when working out. They must be put back on when practice is done.

Q: What advice you would give someone new to the program?

A: Have fun and be patient. It's important to take things slowly and to make sure you have a good experience. For the first year, just figure everything out. Experience the different ways your event practices, how to dress for practices and meets, what a meet looks like, where do we have meets, what is it like to actually compete in a meet, how do you balance school and track, what happens if it rains, and more.

The next year you can start focusing on your performance. Maybe you try a different event or experiment with strategies. It's still early in your career, so continue to be patient. Don't compare yourself to others because you still have a long way to go.

For your third year you are golden. You have experience, have grown, and you have matured. The coaches have a pretty good idea about where you will most likely experience success and you are ready to go. Now you start to dial in on reaching your performance goals and look to make an impact. Things can still change, but you are more focused and determined. Now is ROCKET time.

Everyone has their own definition of success. For some it is making a trip to State. For others it might be placing in the conference or section meet. Some kids want to run on varsity, earn a letter, or reach a specific performance goal. We even have kids that just want to get faster for another sport or get into shape. Whatever your definition of success is, go for it. Our coaching staff is here to help make that happen.

Q: What should I do if I have more questions?

A: No question is a bad question, so direct all questions and concerns to Coach Sonnabend. The easiest way is to send an email through the link on the team website. I am also available after every practice if you would like to meet in person.

Our coaching staff is excited for the upcoming season. We have high expectations and look forward to working with our returning and new athletes. I also look forward to working with both programs and following their progress.

GO ROCKETS!

Mike Sonnabend

Head Coach Boys and Girls Track & Field

John Marshall High School

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