

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)

Invitational gives kids a running start in life

COLUMN By STEVE HEISER *The York Dispatch*
York Dispatch

Article Last Updated: 10/18/2006 10:50:04 AM EDT

I'm not a runner.

I never have been a runner.

Truth be told, I probably never will be a runner.

One look at my physique and it's painfully obvious. I'm not proud of it, but I'm not about to deny it.

But that doesn't mean I'm anti-running. To the contrary, I know that running can be a nearly life-long sport that provides countless health benefits.

That's why it's important that we get as many children involved in running as possible. It can be a valuable weapon in the war against a rapidly growing enemy -- childhood obesity.

Running can also be fun. At least that's what Bob Weikert tells me. Weikert is president of the York Road Runners Club. And his enthusiasm for running practically jumps through the phone line when you talk to him.

Weikert loves the sport and he wants our children to love the sport. That's why the Road Runners are organizing the Panther Middle School Cross Country Invitational on Monday afternoon at Central High School.

"Running is a great sport," Weikert said. "It's a sport that doesn't take a lot of equipment, you can do it at any hours you want ... and you can use it for life, and benefit from it for life."

Weikert also got WellSpan and York Hospital to join in as a sponsor. WellSpan's financial involvement means the participating schools and runners will be able to compete without any cost.

"We're trying to reach out to the community," said Dave Dill, WellSpan's director of rehabilitation medicine. "WellSpan's -- and the hospital's -- mission is to improve the health and well-being of the community, and this is a way of doing that." So far, according to Weikert, the response to the invitational has been outstanding. Approximately 10 school districts and nearly 200 runners have signed up.

"Middle school cross country is one of the success stories in running," Weikert said. "It's really growing and it's done more for running overall than anything. The kids just love it and it's a real boost for the senior high programs."

This year's turnout looks to be a vast improvement over the inaugural event last year, when poor weather nearly created a "washout," according to Weikert. Right now, the forecast for Monday looks good. Let's hope the meteorologists are right.

Because this is a program that needs to become an annual success story. It's important for our children and their health.

And it's fun. At least that's what Weikert tells me.

Of course, I wouldn't know. I'm not a runner.

But maybe, if there was a program around like this when I was young, I would be a runner right now. I would be having fun right now. And I wouldn't have the body I have right now.

Steve Heiser is sports editor of The York Dispatch. He can be reached at 854-1575, ext. 455, or at sheiser@yorkdispatch.com. For more information on the York Road Runners Club, visit yorkroadrunner.com.