

JAC Youth Track and Field Philosophy

We at the Jacksonville Athletic Club take a holistic approach to the development of track and field athletes at the youth level (ages 5-12). Please read below for our philosophy to see if our youth program will be a fit for you and your child!

The JAC Practice Philosophy

Fun!- First and foremost, we believe that track and field (both in practices and competitions) should be fun. We also believe that there is something for everybody in the sport of track and track and field. Our ultimate goal is that our youth find events that they enjoy, and will eventually want to work hard at. In order to do this, we need to make learning the sport fun!

Development- During practices our youth in the ages 5-8 group will learn basic movement patterns that will help across all event areas, and they will also get a solid foundation in sprinting, jumping, throwing, as well as endurance running, which is usually hidden in game form. Our youth in the ages 9-12 group will receive more focused instruction in the more technical field events, and be allowed to gravitate towards the event areas they enjoy doing.

Motivation- Our youth will not be pushed too hard for instant results, but rather guided towards helping them find what events they really enjoy doing. We firmly believe that even at the youth level, the motivation for working hard is intrinsic (happening naturally and internally), rather than extrinsic (from outside sources such as coaches or parents)

Environment- Finally, we believe that all children learn at different speeds and rates, so we aim to provide a learning environment where they can feel encouraged and comfortable making mistakes as they learn.

The JAC Competition Philosophy

-Our youth program is divided up into 3 seasons, fall, spring, and summer. During the fall season we offer 1 competition opportunity, during the spring we typically offer 2-3 competition opportunities, and during the summer 4-6 competition opportunities.

-All competitions are 100% optional. We let the athletes and their family decide if they want to compete.

-We do not push competition or results in comparison to others, as we like to teach the youth that it is all about bettering themselves. The whole goal at the youth level is not placement or winning ribbons / medals, but rather learning how important it is to strive to do better than you did last time.

-All children mature and grow at different rates, which makes the hyper-competitive youth track meet culture damaging to long term development by providing a false sense of "success". What really matters is self-improvement at the youth level.

-Kids do things that are fun for them! If they want to compete, they will. It shouldn't be the coach or parent pushing the child to compete. If someone pushes them too hard, it will take the fun out of the endeavor and could drive them away.

Do We Know What We Are Doing?

No track club in the state of Florida has sent more athletes to college over the past decade than we have. We are confident in our coaching abilities, and can get high school aged athletes to college if that is their goal. But how do we get to that point? By having the athletes still enjoying the sport of track and field at the high school level! This starts with getting them hooked at a younger age, and then having them want to continue to get better (year in and year out) in a gradual and consistent manner.

As the director of the youth program, I have both my [USATF Level 3](#) and [IAAF Level 5](#) coaching certificates in “Youth Specialization”. These are the highest possible track and field coaching certifications available, both in the United States, as well as internationally. Athletes who have gone through our club have gone on to set high school state records, collegiate conference records, qualify for the Olympic trials, set national records, and even win an NCAA Championship! However, we fully understand they can only get to that level if we treat the youth level appropriately. We have sadly witnessed too many athletes pushed too hard at the youth level (both by coaches and well-meaning parents) that by the time they are in high school they are either injured, burnt out, or they just quit the sport all together.

Since 2013 we have sent over 60 athletes to compete at the collegiate level. Not a single one of them participated in the youth Junior Olympics, nor did they travel all over the country trying to win age-group medals, nor did they even only focus in on track and field prior to the age of 13! They all did multiple sports growing up, and continued to enjoy track and field as they got older. Over time these athletes went from enjoying certain events, to committing themselves to getting better at them.

If the goal is to get a college scholarship, then the athletes need to be enjoying the sport long term. We firmly believe that it all starts with how they are coached and encouraged between the ages of 5-12!

What if Our Philosophy Doesn't Match Yours?

That is completely fine! We are confident that this is the best and healthiest way to work with youth athletes in a way that will allow them to have long-term success. However, if you would like for your child to be in a more competitive environment right now, we will gladly issue you a refund and help you find a track club in the area that can assist. There are plenty of clubs in the Jacksonville area that like to travel all over and compete in meets every weekend, and we can gladly direct you towards a club that may be a better fit for you.

