

Science Olympiad helps curious students pursue special interests

[Avonelle Reliford](#)

The competition was on, science being tested in an olympiad, and junior Noah Wartenbee had just managed to build a little battery-powered car. The first time it ran, it was off its mark, the second time closer. Not close enough, Wartenbee thought. Yet when awards came around, his no-bigger-than-40-centimeters car had won 3rd place. A fire was then born, the hunger for learning and building more. Wartenbee was already thinking about improvements, the pride of his invention swirling inside him.

Students are learning all the time—it is their job. But sometimes, especially curious kids don't have their wonder satiated enough by the things they learn in school. That is why some choose to go even further by joining an extracurricular activity like Science Olympiad, where they are able to pursue their own special interests.

"A lot of the times, I notice students that are interested in a very niche science can't really get their fill of that in school," Co-coach David Bossman said. Bossman coaches East's Science Olympiad alongside Sidney Zyla.

Science Olympiad offers testing, lab, and building events. Wartenbee, whose interest lies in the building events, appreciates the skills he's getting out of it.

"I plan on going to UNL for chemical engineering, and a lot of my events use physics-based math," Wartenbee said. "If I had the parts right now, I could build a small electric car."

According to Bossman, doing well in Science Olympiad requires a lot of

intrinsic motivation. It is foundationally studying and learning as much as can be learnt about a subject, which extends beyond what is typically needed for school, since the topics explored in Science Olympiad are so niche.

"I think because the events are very specific, you really have to study deep, where I think a lot of times in high school, the studying is a little more broad," Bossman said. "[In high school] you learn a little bit of a lot, and here you're learning a lot of a little."

Bossman says that curiosity is important for the activity because intrinsic motivation is needed to study so deeply. For Wartenbee, who has been in Science Olympiad since the 8th grade, the curiosity is certainly there.

"It's an equivalent of playing a sport, but for your brain," Wartenbee said.

Cross-country boys team forges new path

Avonelle Reliford
 Reporter

The sun is shining, the air cool with a wispy breeze. All is relatively quiet at the front side of Bellevue East. Then comes the rhythmic pounding of shoes hitting the chalky ground, the swishy sound of panting runners, and the low murmur emanating from their bounces as they jog uphill for practice. What follows for East’s cross country team during practice sessions are the occasional call-outs from teammates when both heads and stamina dip low.

“You got it, you got it.”

“Just focus on your breathing.”

“You can do this!”

“Keep going!”

This is the necessary support athletes need to persevere.

Having a community in team sports like cross-country is critical for keeping athletes in a good headspace and provides the fundamental support many need to reach their full potential. But as things on the team change with people graduating and moving on, the successors find themselves having to forge a new path for their community.

“It makes me run faster, cause it’s like a legacy you’re trying to live up to, right?” sophomore Timothy Bogatz said. “You want to follow in their footsteps.”

Bogatz, a varsity cross-country runner at East, has been running cross country since middle school. He was close with a runner at East that moved away, but that still does not stop him now from inspiring others. Others such as junior John Paul.

“Our fastest runner right now

is Timothy Bogatz,” Paul said. A varsity runner, Paul recalls a recent meet where alongside the support of Bogatz and the team, he decreased his run time by a whole eight minutes compared to the previous year. “Even though [Tim] had finished a 5K race, which is exhausting, he still stood up and cheered everybody on, and I did the same as I recovered.”

Instructor Connor Mazzei is the head coach of the cross-country team at Bellevue East. He recognizes just how crucial support is for his athletes.

“[Community] is, I think, one of the most important parts of cross country,” Mazzei said. “It’s a very difficult and physically demanding sport. The ability for comradery and achieving individual and team goals is an important life skill. Community provides the tools and the means to accomplish that.”

Mazzei said the 2022 season was one of the team’s best, with many scholarships gained and even a student qualifying for state. Now those athletes have moved on to bigger things. Despite the loss of some valuable team members, Coach Mazzei remains on the optimistic side this season, as more valuable runners are made.

“It ultimately is somewhat empowering to others,” Mazzei said. “The underclassmen, as they grow into upperclassmen, see the successes of our student athletes, and as they transition into college and the workforce, it’s an opportunity for them to rise to the occasion. And they frequently do. I have a lot of hopes this year after a really successful past couple of seasons.”

Evidence in sportsmanship

certainly seems to point to the fact that they are “rising to the occasion”. The team makes sure to keep spirits high.

“We all try to hype each other up, even when we’re just running our practices,” Paul said. “We always try to tell each other ‘good job’ or ‘keep it up’, and ‘you’re doing good’. Especially on meets, too.”

And there’s a reason for it. According to an article published in Nature, peer support stimulates mental toughness, and increases problem-solving skills. But it especially decreases the perceived risk of adversity, which is crucial in high-stress situations like sports when the athlete’s body is tuned to perform.

“[A team] keeps you responsible,” Paul said. “Because if it was purely up to you, it’s really hard to motivate yourself to go outside and run. Especially when you don’t feel like it, or don’t have a lot of energy, it can be really hard.”

The benefits of team culture don’t stop there. Army and Navy Academy writes that team sports also increase fitness, discipline, and resilience in young people.

“Not surprisingly, other benefits of playing team sports include strengthening spiritual health in teens through leadership training, character development, and through shared values,” they write.

There is no wondering why the team is so important to the runners. And with their support, there comes rising potential and new leaders to take charge.

“They help support you and keep you going on your tough days, and your bad runs,” Bogatz said. “They inspire me.”



Pow. Feet pound the ground as sophomore Timothy Bogatz (RIGHT) and the East cross country team start their 5K run after school. Their breathless rhythm, however, never stopped them from making their support known to their teammates. "The team is always positive and encouraging, they tell you to keep going," Bogatz said. *Photo by Avonelle Reliford*

Boys tennis coach takes over as head coach this year

Emily Sterup
 Reporter



Changing the game. Head coach Benjamin Dalton [LEFT] talks to two tennis players, junior Taylor Jarrett and senior Leonidas Greaves [RIGHT] to coach them through a technique to make them better tennis players. Dalton was an assistant coach last year, but this is the first year he is head coach. "The head coach has a lot more of getting everything in place," Dalton said. *Photo by Rudy Bonilla*

Thwack — a bright green ball bounced from one side of the short net to the other as the boys tennis head coach, Instructor Benjamin Dalton swung his tennis racket. The grating sound of tennis shoes shuffling could be heard all along the court. After a few seconds, the ball hit the net and Dalton stopped to demonstrate to the other player a more efficient way of swinging the racket before continuing the drill.

Instructor Benjamin Dalton is in his first season of being head coach after previous coach, Krista Tew, resigned.

“There’s a learning curve to it when you first do it,” Dalton said.

It’s common for someone to be nervous when attempting something new, especially when their teammates are depending on them. After taking on the role of head coach when Instructor Krista Tew left her spot, Dalton says it makes him feel uncertain.

“I get a little nervous that I might be missing a step or not doing something exactly how I’m supposed to or not asking the right person the right questions,” Dalton said.

Senior Leonidas Greaves, who plays for

the boys tennis team, says he feels Dalton has had a positive impact on his performance. For the future, he hopes that his team keeps getting better with Dalton as head coach.

“If there’s something we’re not doing well he really makes sure that we focus on that and do it until we’re doing it right,” Greaves said.

Now that Dalton has taken the role of head coach, there is a new assistant coach: Kristin Bass, who said Dalton is a great head coach to work with.

“As a new coach myself, he explained everything really well to me,” Bass said.

Dalton has had an impact as a coach outside tennis. Alongside Dalton helping his team practice, Bass said she believes Dalton is there to support the players emotionally in stressful times.

“Even in situations where you’re upset and just relax and realize at the end of the day it’s just a game or situation,” Greaves said.

It can be hard for someone to enjoy their job sometimes. But, even with all the pressure that comes with being the main coach for a sports team, Dalton says it can also be fun.

“I think learning how to do it is kind of fun and once you know the process it’s a lot easier,” Dalton said.

AI reimagines positive possibilities



Savannah Stultz
Entertainment Co-Editor

With the recent uproar of controversy surrounding artificial intelligence websites such as ChatGPT, Meta AI, and Grok, many individuals have developed a negative perception of AI as a whole. This reputation has sadly cast a cloud of doubt over other artificial intelligence systems that just don't deserve the hate.

According to Yale Environment 360, some AI has actually been successful in helping meteorologists predict weather forecasts with notable accuracy. They had also reported that for the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, their artificial intelligence Forecasting System (AIFS), was actually better than its physics model counterparts when it came to anticipating certain weather occurrences.

Yale Environment 360 also notes that deadly flooding often affects countries worst when they don't have access to

warning systems or weather data. However, the sudden widespread increase of AI has given many of these countries the opportunity to generate custom weather predictions more quickly and at a lower cost, which could potentially save lives.

Additionally, Texas Connect has mentioned that artificial intelligence has helped make breakthroughs in geology, with one AI created by researchers at The University of Texas (UT) able to successfully forecast several earthquakes a week prior to them occurring. Their AI was trained to analyze geological data from previous years and take into account Earth's reverberations in order to determine the potential strength of an earthquake.

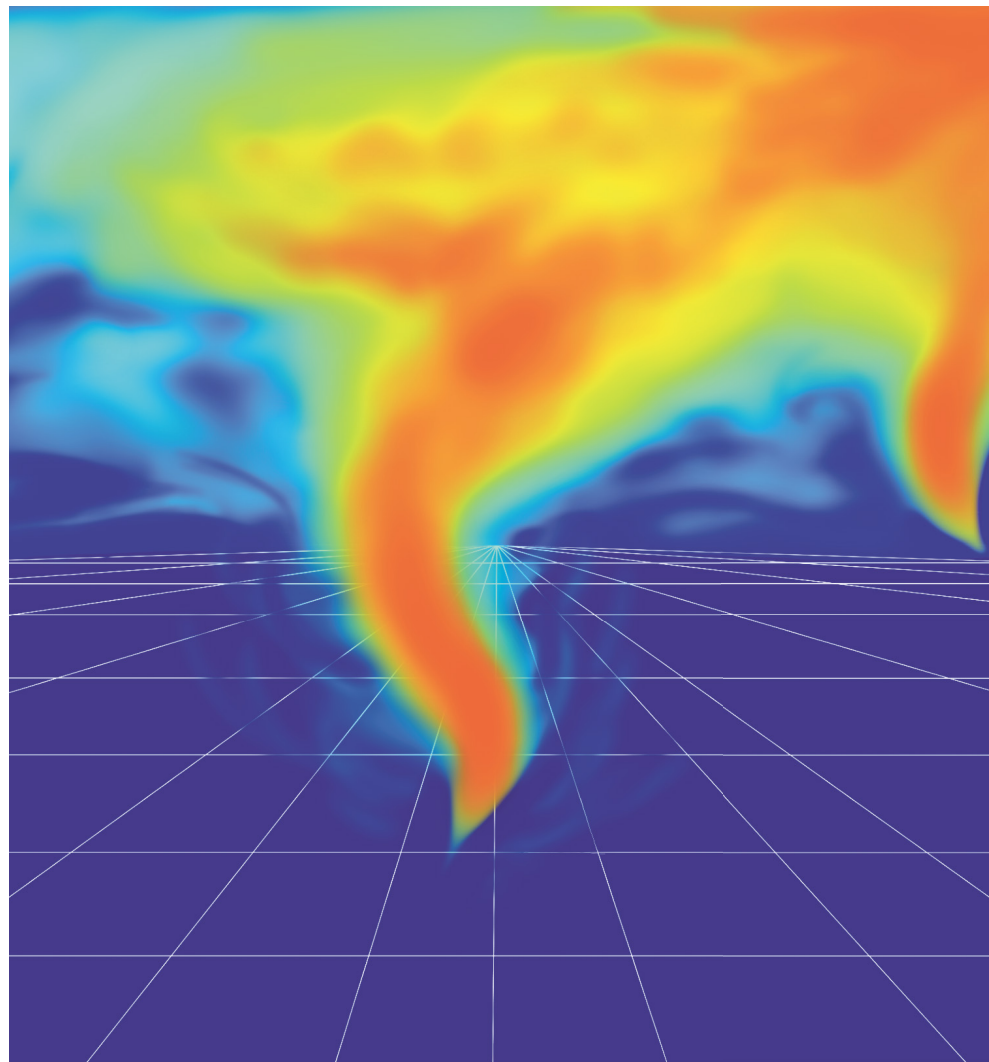
I know it's hard to believe that these AIs can be beneficial when everywhere you turn, people are telling you that AI does more harm than good. And, I'll admit, they do have a point. From biased algorithms, to generated/fake artwork, unhealthy chatbot relationships, and seemingly endless environmental downsides, it's easy to understand the topic's widespread unpopularity.

But at the same time, it's not like AI is going anywhere. Our machinery is only becoming more and more advanced. So, really, what's the harm in indulging in certain artificial intelligence systems that, in the grand scheme of things, are relatively beneficial to our society?

We should not feel guilty, or like it's a "bad" thing to use artificial intelligence no matter what it is. The issue is not that black and white, and there is nuance to

this moral dilemma that society is currently experiencing. I believe that as long as people understand the AI that they are consuming and if the pros outweigh

the cons, they should feel comfortable exploring that technology. AI has many possibilities that are more positive than people think.



Graphic illustration by Sofia Burtnik

You know that's toxic, right? The overnormalization of toxicity in television



Avonelle Reliford
Reporter

We all have that one show we look forward to catching up on after a day of hard work. For me, I was excited for the new releases of The Summer I Turned Pretty.

The summer vibes are totally unmatched, but there was something in the back of my mind that was keeping me from loving it. The main character, Belly, was constantly lashing out at other people for being insensitive about her feelings. Then in the same instant, breaking the commitments she made to the main love interests, and totally brushing aside the feelings of grief that left "the one she wanted" emotionally unavailable. (Later on even implying that emotional unavailability is worse than cheating.)

From making a scene about her failed relationship while at a funeral, to announcing her engagement at a memorial-dedicated lunch, Belly never fails to be

surprised when the consequences of her own actions blow up in her face. And yet, she still finds a way to blame other people.

As I watch this trainwreck, I'm thinking surely everyone watching can see what the real problem is on this show. Yet when I look online, it's all "Team Jeremiah" this, and "Team Conrad" that, followed by "Poor Belly", and "I can't believe he would do this to her!" As much as she'd like to play victim, it's her infuriating immaturity that ends up sabotaging her relationships.

The rare time anybody talked about Belly's wrongs, it was all chalked up to dumb decisions. While definitely stupid, it's even more. It's toxic, and hardly anyone is calling it out. But it's definitely not just in The Summer I Turned Pretty. This normalization of toxic behavior is all over the movies and TV we watch, and that is where my concern lies.

This is especially a problem when the audience these shows reach are teenagers. Raising Children Network, an Australian parenting site says that, "...media influence can suggest to pre-teens and teenagers that certain ways of behaving and looking are 'normal.'" Shows like Euphoria, for example, are framed by drugs and alcohol. Not just the hardship of getting over an addiction, but the constant of it just being unnecessarily there. Never do they outright say it, but it's nearly implied that it's

alright to consume such things underage even frequently, as long as you're not an addict. And despite what the show's target audience might have been, surprise surprise: if it's about highschoolers, highschoolers are going to watch it. When this stuff gets desensitized, it becomes a little internalized. And the last thing teenagers need is a toxic relationship with substances.



So when we watch shows that display toxic behavior, and everyone in that show treats it like it's no big deal-- so do we.

-Sophomore Avonelle Reliford

But we can easily find this in relationships depicted on television, too.

Twilight is probably the second-biggest fall hit (after Gilmore Girls, of course), and contains one of the most well known love triangles in pop-culture history. Edward, or Jacob? Well, "Team Edward" finds his protectiveness to be one of his most attractive qualities. But everything in moderation. As an article by Her Campus states: "Too much 'protection' is exemplary of controlling behavior and emotional manipulation, which is far from healthy." Let's not forget that he enjoyed watching her sleep—an-

other thing that is either overromanticized (even by Bella herself), made into a meme, or straight up brushed off like that's not one of the creepiest things someone could ever do to you. It totally breaks basic boundaries, yet Edward is still loved by many, and even an inspiration for many male love interests in present-day fiction.

Many will still ask why that is a bad thing, because "it's fiction after all, right?"

That's true—but art imitates life, doesn't it? So when we watch shows that display toxic behavior, and everyone in that show treats it like it's no big deal—so do we. When we don't call it out, we internalize it, because it's shown to us as "normal". That's especially dangerous to young people, who are more likely to be on the receiving end of this toxicity because of their inexperience.

Going back to The Summer I Turned Pretty—Belly's not a victim, right? But when she treats herself like one, and her support systems cradle her, and online edits defend her, and people in comments say she's done nothing wrong, we start to believe it. Few actually step out and say that it's not okay the way she acts, but most people don't even see that.

Sometimes, when we don't see anything validating our opinions, or even the truth, we mark it as irrelevant. But the popular consensus is not always the "right" one—and I can say that because

there is evidence in Belly's toxicity. She was the one that decided it was alright to date one brother then the other when that didn't work out, and then back to the first when it was more convenient. Episode after episode she has been making the decision to prioritize her happiness over every person in her life, and make it appear as if her feelings are the only important ones. That's not healthy, or respectful, or moral.

But we're not going to stop things like this being normalized in cinema. And, really, we shouldn't have to. Nick Howard puts it really well in his Medium article titled, "Why Do We Love Toxic Relationships in Pop Culture?" He writes, "While toxic relationships are as old as pop culture, the audience must recognize them. These relationships are not characters we should necessarily want to be like. Their stories are trying to teach us a lesson in life or simply trying to entertain us."

So what's important for us is to be able to identify it when we see it and be grounded in our values. We need to call out toxic behavior when we see it. Don't let people romanticize it, and there's nothing to internalize.

So this summer, I think we should all relax and pray that everyone in The Summer I Turned Pretty gets some professional help. At least it would give Belly a chance to talk about herself.

#TheSummerTheyAllNeedToGetTherapy