

FALL SPORTS PREVIEW

Love of sport keeps East Meck coach on run, at top

By **MAGGIE LEHAN**
Staff Writer

Running is in Larry McAfee's blood.

McAfee has been the cross-country coach at East Mecklenburg for about 20 years and has developed a reputation as one of North Carolina's best.

Maybe it's because of his intense love for the sport he coaches.

In fact, McAfee loves it so much that, in 1978, knowing good runners need good courses to run on, he designed McAlpine Park's 5,000-meter course. It's considered the state's best. The state championships, in all classifications, are held there each year.

"Athletics is the key to my success," McAfee said. "It put me on a schedule and gave me structure."

McAfee has touched nearly every runner he's come across, and there have been plenty.

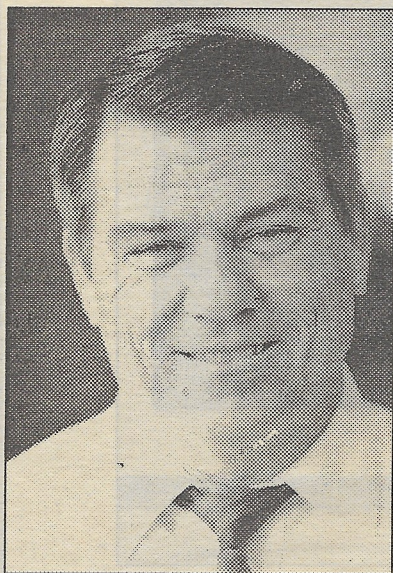
"His record speaks for itself. He has the respect of all the coaches in the state," says Allen Diggs, girls cross-country coach at Providence High — McAfee's rival.

On the high school and junior high levels, McAfee has coached five state champions, 22 regional champions and 23 conference champions in a 24-year coaching career.

McAfee, who received his bachelor's degree in chemistry from UNC Charlotte in 1969, began coaching and teaching chemistry at East Mecklenburg High School in 1974. At the time there was only a men's team. He established the women's team six years later.

He's developed an amazing record of successes since.

Under his leadership, his East Mecklenburg boys teams have won the N.C. 4A cross-country state title four times, the last of which was in 1992. The Eagles have won their N.C. 4A regionals the past eight years, and 11 times total.



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McAfee, 47, a 1965 Harding High graduate. "If we can close the pack we can be among the top three teams in the state. Obviously we want to be conference and regional champions and win another state title."

Like his boys teams, the East girls cross-country squads also have been impressive. East's girls were state champions in 1986 and have eight regional titles, including four in a row from 1987 to '90. The Eagles' girls have won seven conference titles, including six in a row from 1985 to 1990 and again in '92.

"His knowledge of the sport is his greatest asset," Providence cross-country coach Allen Diggs said.

But even before he got to East Mecklenburg, McAfee had a remarkable record of success.

They have won nine straight Southwestern 4A conference titles.

And McAfee wants to make it 10 this year.

"We want to develop a tight pack behind the front men," said

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— **Allen Diggs**, girls cross-country coach at Providence Hightitle, says of his rival, Larry McAfee

After he finished college at UNCC, McAfee taught chemistry, coached boys cross-country and boys track and was an assistant wrestling coach at South Cobb High School in suburban Atlanta. McAfee's teams won.

South Cobb's boys were region and county champions in 1970 and '71.

After South Cobb, McAfee came to Charlotte to coach at Coulwood Junior High. The winning continued. Coulwood was track champion in the junior high league from 1972 to '74.

Then, the successes at East

Please see McAfee/next page