

Former CU Buffs Alan and Shayne Culpepper lead way for next generation of runners

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Former University of Colorado athlete and U.S. Olympian Alan Culpepper first recognized his love for running in a Texas elementary school when twice a year he and his classmates would run the mile in presidential fitness tests.

"That for me was the first indication of like, 'Alright, I like this and it's my day and I would go and set the school record and all that,'"Culpepper said. "That was my first taste of running hard."

Now 39 years old and the father of four, Culpepper and his wife, Shayne, another former Buff, volunteer to lead an after-school running program at Boulder's Douglass Elementary School.

They are helping prepare more than 200 children from kindergarten to fifth grade for two big runs this month.

The first run comes today when the kids participate in the 8th annual Douglass Jog-a-thon at the school, which raises \$20,000 from corporate donations, most of which is invested in science and math programs and technology upgrades at the school.

The program was started to offset funding cuts from the state and encourage kids to be more active.

Third grader Adam Moser and his little sister Anya, a first grader, will run today. Adam Moser said he loves the program and tries to do five or six half-mile laps each time they practice.

"I love running because I love being outside and it's just fun for me," Moser said. "Running is what opens up sports and I love sports."

The second big run the Culpeppers are helping the kids train for is the Bolder Boulder.

The Culpeppers have been volunteering with the program at Douglass for four years and have borrowed ideas for it from several similar programs at other Bolder-area schools.

Every Thursday afternoon through April and early May, Alan Culpepper meets the kids in the school gymnasium when school ends. When he begins leading them in jumping jacks and stretches the decibel level rises to an ear-ringing level.

Culpepper smiles as he sends the kids out on a 1/2-mile course around the school grounds where they are monitored by 25 parents and teachers.

Culpepper often leads a small pack of kids straining their necks to look up to him. He glides along, pied piper of jogging, offering encouragement and high-fives.

"It's also just to get kids out running," Culpepper said. "It's a simple model. By getting them out moving and hopefully changing their perception of what exercise is and that it doesn't have to be torture and it doesn't have to be punishment or only about weight management. It can be just to do it.

"...The goal for this is not to identify future Olympians. It's to create a habit that they can maybe take through life."