

# Unified Track brings students of all abilities together

## First meet on Apr. 24 in Falcon Stadium

By Sydney Mathis

Think about the many different classes, teachers, friendships and experiences that Falcons have over four years at Perry. For **Maggie Cooper's** special ed students, the Unified Track program helps them to gain the friendships and experience that they may not have been able to otherwise.

Unified Track is being lead by Cooper this spring. She defines the sport as quite simply, "a sport that brings individuals with and without disabilities together on a team competing for the same goal."

The athletes are special education students, and they have Perry student partners to help perform next to them and encourage them along the way. The idea is to unify students in track and field events so that no one can tell who has a disability or not.

The events offered in this program include the 100m, 400m, shot



Senior Katie Jones and junior Erin Sims participate in cool down stretches after unified track practice (Photo by Adam Crozier).

put, and long jump. There is also a 4:1 girls team and 4:1 boys team in the works added this year.

The scoring process is different than the other track and field team. In Unified Track, athletes compete in their events, and for each place, there is a different amount of points granted.

For example, first place receives 10 points, second place receives 8 points, third place receives 6 points. For every other place it goes down by one.

The points are then added up,

and they are granted to the Unified Track team. The team practices Mondays and Thursdays after school until 3:15. They also take advantage of time during Blu63 for practice as well.

The team has not had any meets yet this year, but their first meet is against Southport at Falcon Stadium on Apr. 24.

Senior athlete **Katie Jones** is doing the 400 meter and shot put events. Jones did unified track before. Her partner is senior **Caroline Kavanaugh**.

**"I would try to encourage anyone to do it because it is good to be able to meet new people and encourage other runners."**

— senior **Katie Jones**

"I am very excited for Unified Track this year, said Jones. "I love to run the 400s and get encouraged by others at the end."

Jones and senior **Emily Ray** agree that the Unified Track team has helped them gain more friendships already.

This program has broken many barriers between special education students with their peers.

"My favorite part of unified track is the actual involvement of students," said Cooper.

"Many of my students rarely ever leave the one hallway my classroom is in, and unified track gave my students the opportunity to build relationships and friendships. It has even built acceptance."

Kavanaugh agreed.

"I have definitely built relationships, not only with the athletes, but also with other partners. It is cool to see everyone work together to become better."

The Unified Track athletes have the same benefits as any other sports team.

Cooper points out that junior **Hannah Hendricks** has a letter jacket that she has earned through a copious amount of effort she has herself from Unified Track.

"I would try to encourage anyone to do it because it is good to be able to meet new people and encourage other runners," said Jones.



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TWEET OF THE WEEK



Dayanna Moreno  
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When Nick Jonas said "I eat cheese, but only on pizza, please And sometimes on a homemade quesadilla, otherwise it tastes like feet to me" I felt that