

# SPORTS

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NEW BERLIN CITIZEN

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## THE SIDELINES

### FIRSTWORD

*"The aim was to harness kids' instinctive love of running and make it fun for all ages and ability levels."*

#### **RUSS BELLFORD**

NBAA board member, on organization's first-year track & field program

*"The kids showed more enthusiasm than I've seen in any of the coaching I've done in soccer, basketball or baseball over the past five years."*

#### **MIKE THOMPSON**

NBAA track & field coaching staff member, on youth participants in first-year program



PHOTO COURTESY OF NBAA

## SWEET REWARDS

Two athletes representing the New Berlin Athletic Association's ground-breaking track and field program competed in Wisconsin state finals of Hershey Track Meet.

**THERESE THOMPSON:** took third in 800 meters in 2 minutes, 48 seconds in 11-12 age group.

**CAYLA HOLTZ:** finished third in 400 meters in 1:10 and second in softball throw at 125 feet-1 inch, also in 11-12 age group.

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**PHOTO:** New Berlin Athletic Association teammates Therese Thompson (left) and Veronica Diedrich, both 11, push each other to the finish of a 1,600-meter run. Track and field was added to NBAA programming for the first time in the summer of 2006.

## NBAA Track & Field Program off, running Brainstorm brings rapid, successful results

By Mark Hutchinson  
Sports Editor

The New Berlin Athletic Association has been part of the city's landscape for over 40 years, but it entered a new frontier in 2006.

Having provided basketball, baseball, softball and soccer instruction and competition for youth of the community for parts of four decades, the organization ventured for the first time into the sport of track and field last spring.

The exploration actually began during summer 2005.

"About this time a year ago, I was speaking with Russ Bellford about what a shame it is that New Berlin didn't have some sort of program for young kids interested in track," Mike Thompson said.

"Russ, who is an avid runner and a member of the NBAA board, did some research and got approval for a track program for kids in grades three through eight.

"Russ served as head coach and I, along with several others, assisted him."

The team practiced four times a week from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at the

Eisenhower High School track.

Athletes were encouraged to attend two practices per week, but were free to attend only one, none three or all four practices per week depending on their schedules and other commitments.

Participating in track meets was optional.

Like Thompson, Bellford believes the program filled a vacancy in one of the area's most established and successful youth sports organizations.

"I love running and think that track and field is a great sport," Bellford said. "It promotes commitment, discipline, focus, energy, drive, and lends itself to developing a habit of life-long fitness."

"There are a lot of kids who are very passionate about running, but unlike adults, young athletes need the support of a team to maintain their enthusiasm and fuel their motivation."

The organizers saw the new program's rewards early and often, and two of its participants made it to the Wisconsin finals of the Hershey Track Meet. Therese Thompson placed third in the 800 meters in 2 minutes, 48 seconds,

and Cayla Holtz finished third in the 400 meters (1:10) and second in the softball throw (125 feet-1 inch), both in the 11-12 age group.

"We attracted 75 kids from the New Berlin area who participated in a five-week program that ran May 30 through June 29," Mike Thompson said. "We saw dramatic progress in times and distances over the five-week season."

Bellford saw the improvement, too. "The appeal of track and field is its simplicity," he said. "The goal was to create an environment where kids would train to improve their strength, stamina, speed and confidence, unencumbered by sport-specific rules, plays, positions, equipment, or wins and losses.

"We timed and measured the athletes' performance in various events at the beginning of the season, then again during our end-of-season meet. Most improved, in many cases by a wide margin, and thus earned a 'personal record' award.

"We wanted them to see that the real challenge, in athletics or any endeavor, is with one's own self." Bellford, Thompson and

their staff managed to accomplish this within a fun environment.

"The aim was to harness kids' instinctive love of running and make it fun for all ages and ability levels," Bellford said. "For example, the conditioning segment of each practice was often done in the form of a relay, chase or tag-type game.

"The kids were training like crazy, but having too much fun to realize it. In the end, I hope the kids equate running with fun."

The coaches were not the only ones who gave the ground-breaking program rave reviews.

"The responses we received from the parents were overwhelmingly positive and the kids showed more enthusiasm than I've seen in any of the coaching I've done in soccer, basketball or baseball over the past five years," Thompson said. "We anticipate the program will expand greatly next year, but many people in the area aren't even aware of its existence at this time."

To get more information about plans for the 2007 NBAA Track & Field season, contact Bellford at (262) 786-9488 or visit [www.nbaasports.com](http://www.nbaasports.com).

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