



### Runner Marches To His Own Tune

Jon Korhonen is not only a track star, but a drum major for the UMass Marching Band.

Jon Korhonen competes for the men's track & field team, as well as plays in the marching band.

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Managing your time is very important to any student at the University of Massachusetts. It is even more important for sophomore [Jon Korhonen](#). He runs the 1,500 and 5,000 meters for the track team. He is one of four drum majors for the marching band. He also had a 4.0 grade point average in the fall semester, earning him the award as the top student-athlete on the men's track and field team. To say the least, the Gardner, Mass., native is getting the most out of his UMass experience.

"I know where I have to put my time and effort," said Korhonen. "I'm a very schedule-oriented person."

He takes his classes in the morning, and then from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m., splits his time between band and track practice. When you factor in time to sleep, eat, and do homework, he has to be organized. In the fall, his top priority is with the band, performing at all of the football games and other competitions. This means he misses the entire cross country season. In the spring, he concentrates on track and is UMass' top runner at 1,500 meters and number two at 5,000 meters.

Korhonen came to UMass with the idea of doing both. He had been the drum major at Gardner High School, where the band director is Michael LaCava, a former UMass drum major. He also ran track and exploded in his senior season, finishing second in the mile at the New England High School Championships. Korhonen approached both Marching Band Director George Parks and men's cross country and track and field coach [Ken O'Brien](#) about joining both squads.

"We had hoped to get a few meets out of him in the fall, but the band is very busy," said O'Brien. "A distance runner spends most of his cross country season building up his strength for track and field. Jon basically has trained pretty much on his own in the fall, practicing with the team one or two days a week. For him to come back and do distance running so successfully is an unusual double.

"In many respects he's overscheduled," continued O'Brien. "He's a young man who wants to do a lot of things, but he doesn't do them in a half-hearted way. He puts out 100 percent. I don't know how he maintains the schedule and maintains his enthusiasm and doesn't burn out physically and mentally."

Korhonen sees a lot of similarities between the marching band and the track team. Both require a lot of hard work to get to the goals set. They also allow you to see your improvement week-to-week. The show takes shape for the band and the times get better on the track. He judges a successful season for both "teams" in how much he has improved the product.

"There's a feeling you get from having a great performance in the band," said Korhonen. "It's the same thing you get when you win a race."

Korhonen started his UMass band career playing the saxophone as a freshman. Of the approximate 300 members in the marching band, there are only four drum majors. Heading into his sophomore year, one of those positions was open. Korhonen tried out against 14 others and got it.

Parks looks for several things in a drum major. First, he wants a strong musician, who can teach the other band members and act as an assistant director. He also needs someone who can control the tempo of 300 people marching on the field

with hand gestures. The drum major has to have "penache" and showmanship that the crowd will respond to and also has to have an air of confidence that will cause the band to follow its leader.

"He is a natural leader," said Parks. "He has a great personality and smile. Those things help people have a confidence in him. He's a very hard worker and loyal to the program. The commitment is tough, as it is every day in all kinds of weather conditions. You have to lead in such a positive way that any body will follow in a positive way." On of the biggest responsibilities for a drum major, especially in summer band camp, is to help students out that may not be having a great experience. The drum majors are expected to talk with these students and help them hang in there.

"I think you have to earn the respect of the people in the band before you can tell them what to do," said Korhonen.

These qualities also make Korhonen a good teammate for his fellow athletes. He enjoys working towards a common goal, helping teammates achieve that throughout the season by being supportive and cheering for them.

This season, he set personal bests in both of his events, running 3:54.36 to place fifth in the 1,500-meter run at the A-10 Championships. He also was a member of UMass' 4x800-meter relay team which placed fifth at the A-10 meet, and a 15:26.86 in the 5,000-meter run at Brown University. Korhonen has set a goal of breaking the 15 minute barrier.

"With time, I should get better," said Korhonen. "That's my goal in everything I do. I believe if I improve, then it's a successful year for me."

While Korhonen has done well at both 1,500- and 5,000-meter runs, O'Brien believes that the 5K may be his best distance.

"Jon is a solid miler," said O'Brien. "He has good speed, but not great speed. Jon can be a great 5,000 runner, because he has great strength and decent speed." Korhonen comes from a tight-knit family in nearby Gardner. He credits his parents and grandparents for being very supportive in all his activities.

"There's no way I could have a job with my schedule," said Korhonen. "My parents said that they would rather have me do track and be in the band than have a job. They seem to get the same kind of excitement that I get."

He also thanks both O'Brien and Parks for being receptive to his "Daily Double." Both the band and track team have to give up a little to get a lot.

"His personality is tremendous," said O'Brien. "He's a tremendous teammate. He's a high character kid with a great sense of humor, boundless enthusiasm, and extremely mature. He has a real balance of great personality, desire, commitment, and enthusiasm."

"I have to get out and see him in a track meet," said Parks. "It's been fun working with him and watching him develop. I think he could be one of our best drum majors."

Korhonen has yet to declare a major. He is thinking of going into communications. He's not sure what he wants to do right now, but wants it to involve event coordination and organization. One would think a company would look very favorably on his organizational skills after excelling in the band, on the track team, and in the classroom.