**Background**

- Instagram® is a popular social media platform among high school students.
- High school cross country (XC) runners with poor nutrition are more prone to injuries.
- Nutrition education needs to involve athletes, coaches, and parents to be most effective.
- Parents, athletes, and coaches need to have access to credible and evidence-based nutrition information.

**Hypothesis**

- Instagram® is an effective platform to educate high school cross country runners on nutrition information.
- Coaches and parents following the Instagram® account will reinforce nutrition messages to athletes.

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**Methods**

**Study Design:**

- A private, Instagram® account was created with targeted nutrition content addressing the needs of high school cross country athletes.
- The account was opened to team, parents, and coaches in August 2019, start of the XC season.
- Targeted nutrition education addressed dietary calcium, vitamin D, iron, carbohydrate, and protein balance, and hydration.

**Subjects:**

- Number of subject following Instagram® account: 
  - n=18 high school cross country runners (10= male, 8= female)
  - n=6 parents
  - n=4 coaches

**Data Collection:**

- Post-season, qualitative data were collected and analyzed from structured interviews with coaches and focus groups with athletes.

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**Results**

Coaches are highly influential for encouraging athletes to follow Instagram® account:

- Initial following 7 athletes
- When coach re-introduced Instagram® account to the team following increased to 18 athletes (full team)

**Coaches Report:** (n=3)

1. Instagram® was effective for increasing awareness about the targeted nutrition messages
2. Multiple ways of displaying content e.g., video, infographic, and recipes were helpful
3. Real food images versus generic graphics would encourage athletes to eat the foods recommended

**Athletes Report:** (n=5)

1. Most nutrition information on social media is confusing and sends conflicting messages
2. Viewed this Instagram® account as a trusted resource
3. The Instagram® account was, "easy to understand, but specific enough to be helpful" - e.g., learned the importance of micronutrients (iron) for athletes
4. More frequent posts would be helpful versus all content posted at one time

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**Summary and Conclusions**

1. Coach providing verbal cues about the account is key to athletes following and using the account.
2. The athletes, parents, and coaches all having access to the same information had a positive effect on engagement.
3. Instagram® is a valuable platform for teaching sports nutrition to high school students.

**Recommendations to Make the Platform More Interactive**

1. Athletes sharing images of themselves making or completing recipes
2. Athletes participating in cooking videos
3. Turning on Instagram® post notifications

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**Citations: MLA**

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