

Jake Stewart

Director of Track & Field and Cross Country

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Biography

Jake Stewart, who led the Gonzaga women's track and cross country programs to unprecedented success for eight years from 2018-26, was named Cal Poly's Director of Track & Field and Cross Country in August 2026.

Stewart, who was named the Director of Track and Cross Country in waiting at Gonzaga in April 2026, brings 20 years of experience coaching collegiate runners to Cal Poly, including 15 years as a head coach.

"We're thrilled to welcome Jake and his family to San Luis Obispo," Director of Athletics Carter Henderson said. "From our first conversation, it was clear how much he cares about the people in his program, and that's exactly what we were looking for. Jake built sustained success at Gonzaga, developing athletes into All-Americans, and did it while producing exactly the kind of student-athlete Cal Poly attracts. His track record speaks for itself, and we can't wait to see what he builds here."

Stewart served as the head coach of the women's track and cross country teams at Gonzaga from 2018-26, helping the Bulldogs build an elite distance program in the West. While at Gonzaga, Stewart oversaw six All-Americans between track and cross country, 27 NCAA West Preliminary qualifiers on the track, and 15 All-West Coast Conference honorees, 10 USTFCCCA All-West Region performances and three NCAA individual qualifiers in cross country.

During his time leading the Gonzaga women's cross country program, Stewart guided the Bulldogs to some of their most successful seasons in program history and allowed them to earn a national ranking for five consecutive seasons from 2021-25. During that span, the Zags finished fourth or better at the West Coast Conference Championships every year, including three second-place finishes (2021, 2023, 2025) and a conference title two years ago. Gonzaga qualified for the NCAA Championships as a team in 2024 for just the second time in program history, placing 25th, and captured its third ever West Coast Conference title and first in nine years. The Zags matched a program-record with a fourth-place finish at the NCAA West Regional to earn an at-large bid to nationals, and the team achieved its highest national ranking ever in the USTFCCCA poll, climbing as high as No. 16 that season.

Gonzaga was dominant during the 2024 cross country season, capturing six team titles and matching a program record ranking of No. 3 in the West Region — one of the toughest regions in the country — and maintaining that ranking for three weeks. Stewart coached four All-WCC runners, including the WCC individual champion, and two All-Region honorees that season, earning WCC Coach of the Year honors.

In 2025, Stewart helped two runners secure individual berths to the NCAA XC Championships and coached three All-West Region honorees, guiding Gonzaga to a second-place finish at the WCC Championships. The Bulldogs were ranked as high as No. 20 in 2025 in the USTFCCCA poll and received their first ever preseason top 15 national ranking from FloTrack, checking in at No. 14.

On the track at Gonzaga, Stewart coached five All-Americans, helped the Bulldogs shatter 24 school records between the indoor and outdoor seasons and oversaw 124 top-10 marks in program history.

Stewart mentored Rosina Machu, one of the greatest women's distance runners in Gonzaga history. In 2026, Machu earned Second Team All-American honors in the 10,000-meter and Honorable Mention recognition in the 5,000 to finish her career as a five-time All-American between track and cross country, the most All-American honors by a woman to run for the Zags ever. Machu, the first Gonzaga woman to qualify for an NCAA Final on the track, broke her own 10,000-meter school record en route to placing seventh at the 2025 NCAA Championships to earn First Team All-American honors. She competed in the meet alongside her teammate Logan Hofstee, who became the first Zag freshman in program history to qualify for an NCAA Final and earn All-American honors. It marked the first time in program history multiple Bulldogs competed in the same NCAA Final.

In cross country, Machu won back-to-back WCC individual championships and WCC Runner of the Year awards (2023-24), and placed 16th at the 2023 NCAA XC Championships to become the second women's cross country All-American in program history and the first since 1996.

In the fall of 2021, Stewart guided Kristen Garcia to a third-place finish individually at the NCAA XC West Regional, allowing her to earn an individual berth to the NCAA Championships. Gonzaga earned a national ranking that season in the USTFCCCA poll for the first time in six years and placed fourth as a team at the NCAA West Regional, matching their program record finish at the meet. The Bulldogs also achieved a national ranking of No. 21 the following cross country season and were ranked for the entirety of the 2024 season.

During the 2025 track season, Stewart qualified a program-record six Gonzaga women between eight events for the NCAA West Prelims. Stewart coached the women's 4K and 6K school record holders in cross country during his tenure with the Zags, and nine of the top 10 4K performances in school history and eight of the top 10 in the 6K. The programs he oversaw also earned USTFCCCA All-Academic Team honors every year he was there, and 173 student-athletes he coached were named to the university's President's List (3.85 GPA or higher).

Prior to Gonzaga, Stewart spent six seasons (2012-18) leading the men's distance program at Illinois back into the national spotlight, serving as the men's cross country head coach from 2012-17 before being named the first head men's and women's cross country coach in the history of the program in the fall of 2017.

Stewart, a native of Kelso, Washington, inherited a men's cross country program at Illinois that had not finished better than sixth at Big Ten Championships since 1996, guiding them to a runner-up finish at the

conference meet in 2015 while coaching the program's first All-American in the sport (Dylan Lafond) in eight years and mentoring the Big Ten Freshman of the Year Jesse Reiser. The following season in 2016, Stewart led the Illini to their first appearance in the NCAA Cross Country Championships in 30 years, where they finished 23rd. He was named the 2016 USTFCCA Midwest Region Cross Country Coach of the Year for his efforts that season.

Stewart also served as an assistant coach on the Fighting Illini track and field staff during his tenure, helping the program capture the Big Ten Outdoor Championship in men's track and field in 2015, and mentoring 10 All-Americans and four Big Ten individual champions.

Before arriving at Illinois, Stewart had stints at Purdue (2011-12) and Lamar (2009-11). As the men's cross country head coach at Purdue, he helped the Boilermakers earn their best team finish since 2008 and recruited the program's first All-American. While at the helm at Lamar, he guided the program to back-to-back Southland Conference championships in cross country (2009-10), and was named the Southland Conference Coach of the Year twice.

Stewart served as an assistant coach for the men's and women's cross country and track and field teams at his alma mater, Iona College, for three years (2006-09). In his time with the Gaels, the men's cross country team captured runner-up in both 2007 and 2008 at the NCAA Championships, the highest finish of any team in the school's history, while the women's team qualified for the national championships for the first time ever. The men's team was named the NCAA Division I All-Academic Team of the Year in 2006 and 2007.

In the spring of 2006, Stewart began his coaching career as an assistant track coach at Western Oregon University.

During his time competing at Iona, Stewart helped the Gaels win four MAAC championships and finish in the top 10 at the NCAA Championships every year. In addition, he was a captain on the 2005 team, becoming the first walk-on in program history to achieve the feat.

Stewart earned his master's degree in sports administration from Concordia University in 2012, and his bachelor's of science in English from Iona College in 2005. He and his wife, Brandi, have a son, Griffin, and a daughter, Poppy.

Coaching History

Cal Poly Director of Track & Field and Cross Country, August 2026-Present

Gonzaga Director of Track & Field in Waiting, April 2026

Gonzaga Head Coach, Women's Track & Cross Country, 2018-26

Illinois Head Coach, Men's & Women's Cross Country, 2017-18

Illinois, Head Coach, Men's Cross Country; Assistant Track Coach, 2012-17

Purdue, Head Coach, Men's Cross Country, 2011-12

Lamar, Assistant Coach, Men's & Women's Track & Field and Cross Country, 2009-11

Iona, Assistant Coach, Men's & Women's Track & Field and Cross Country, 2006-09
