CROSS COUNTRY BASICS

What is it?

Cross Country is a running sport for all ages. It is different from other running sports in that races take place over natural terrain. Courses may include, but are not limited to grass, trails, hills, dirt, mud, gravel, puddles, bark, crushed lime, tree roots, and trees.

What distance is run?

In Hamilton County, middle schools run 3000 meters (1.89 miles). In Indiana, high schools run 5000 meters (3.1 miles).

What's a good time?

For 3000 meters a good time differs by gender. For boys anything under 11:30 is a good time. For girls anything under 12:30 is considered good. With all of this said, a good time is difficult to judge. Not all of us are granted great running talent. The best way to judge a good time is to base it on your training and improvement. For example, we've seen students drop six and seven minutes off of their first time trial and not break 13:00. That is viewed as great success! Times are important for individual runners to use as a measuring stick with themselves.

What's varsity and what's reserve?

Varsity is made up of the top seven runners for each team. This is nearly exclusively based upon times. There are exceptions to this, and coaches use their best discretion in making final decisions. Anyone who does not run as a varsity runner is considered reserve (or sometimes junior varsity).

How are races grouped?

All races are grouped by gender. Any student in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade can compete in our races. Boys race against boys and girls race against girls. The Creekside Kickoff races are further divided into grade level races. For example there is a race for sixth grade boys as well as for eighth grade girls.

What's a finish chute?

A finishing chute is setup at the finish line of a race. It is usually about twenty yards in length and trimmed with flags. It's designed to help keep finishers in correct order until names, finish places, ribbons, and scores are being tallied.

Why craft sticks?

Craft sticks or numbered cards are handed out to finishing athletes with their place number written on it. We collect the sticks/cards as finishers move to the end of the chute.

How are meets scored?

Meets are scored a little differently than most sports. Teams are trying to score as LOW a score as possible. Fifteen (15) points is the lowest a team may score. Runners are awarded points based on their finishing place. The first place runner scores one point (1). The second place runner scores two points (2). The seventh place runner scores seven (7) points. Hopefully you're seeing the scoring trend. There are some catches to all of this, though. Teams are allowed to score only seven runners. Once a team has had its seven scorers cross the line no other runners on that team will score points. The first five runners compile the team's score, but their sixth and seventh runners still act as "pushers" by holding point values from other teams. Runners will be recognized for finishing in those spots, but no score will be assigned to them.

TRAINING

What to do about injuries?

Injuries can be common especially for students new to running. The most important step is communicate with someone who has knowledge. Please see a coach if a problem exists. The coaching staff will help evaluate the level of need. The school's trainer is also willing and able to work with student athletes. There is a protocol that we follow to protect against severe damage being done. The first line of defense is to CONTACT someone with EXPERT knowledge. The people mentioned above are great sources to START with. Beyond these contacts, doctors are the next in line.

Keeping the aforementioned information in mind here are some very basic rules to follow:

Heating sore muscles and joints after workouts is generally DISCOURAGED. That includes hot tubs and heating pads alike. Ice is generally the best route to go, but keep in mind there is a limit. Keep the icing time at 15 - 20 minutes, and contact an EXPERT if it continues for several practices/days. It also helps to elevate the body part that is being iced. The goal here is to keep inflammation to a minimum.

There are also some stretches that can be used to strength and prevent injuries to certain parts of the body. This is probably not the best forum to discuss all of them. Please consult with your coaches.

What kinds of workouts do we have?

Workouts consist of a warmup (approximately a 1/2 mile), full team stretching, situps and pushups, planks, and then a regular workout.

Workouts can be from as little as 1 1/2 miles to nearly 5 miles in length. Here's a list of different runs we utilize:

Neighborhood/Monon runs

Tempo runs

Mile repeats

Move-up (once referred to as Indian runs) in groups of 5 - 8

Track work-outs

Fartlek (strange Swedish word) 1-3 minutes at hard pace, 1-3 minutes’ easy pace

Sharks and Minnows (huge game of group tag)

Strideouts

How are practices organized?

Practices are organized into three to four groups. Generally, one coach leads a group. Groups are based strictly on ability and experience in running. Coaches work to keep groups similar. Movement between groups does and is expected to happen. For example, Joe maybe working with group 3 on Monday for a two mile run. On Wednesday he may feel strong enough to work with group 2 during a speed workout. In this manner everyone is working with a "safe" core group of similar runners. Coaches' expectations for each group are based on that group's experience and desire for that day. There are many members of the team that like having tough workouts numerous times in a week. Others prefer a lighter schedule. We have a place for everyone.

NUTRITION

What kinds of meals do I need to eat?

Generally the meals that are served at home are great! No one is world-renowned professional athlete at this level, so we don't need to get into specific weights, measures, vitamins, minerals, or supplements here. Keep your meals balanced. Don't skip the vegetables, milk, or fruit. Even if you can't stand certain ones, have a small helping. Just think of it as avoiding a confrontation at the dinner table while contributing to a better body.

What role does water play?

Hands down water is the best liquid to drink. Water is important in regulating body temperature. The body's muscles produce much heat while running. It is critical to replace those fluids. Get in the habit of having water at regular intervals throughout the day. This is true during cool or even cold weather. It is especially important to hydrate often during warm or hot days, though. If you wait until you are thirsty, you are already dehydrating. Make it a habit. This is not to say that sports drinks are bad, but they shouldn't replace water at the top of the list.

To carb or not to carb?

Carbohydrates are GREAT!!!! They are a must for all athletes. These compounds are what give you most of your energy to train and compete. With that said let's be smart about this: there is such a thing as too much of a good thing. You need to find good sources of carbohydrates. Avoid simple sugars; keep them to a minimum. These are found in most of our processed foods.

Here are some common ones to avoid: candy, potato chips, pastries, box dinners, enriched anything, and sodas.

Natural grains, fresh fruits and vegetables are the way to go.

Keep your eating habits balanced. Too much of anything can usually be bad. Mom and Dad can be very helpful in this area too. Ask them for their thoughts.

Being middle school students, you shouldn't be consuming a low carb or no carb diet unless a physician or dietician is helping to manage this. If this does apply, please speak with our trainer and/or a coach.

MISCELLANEOUS

What equipment is needed?

One of the least expensive sports, Cross Country requires a pair of running shoes, shorts, socks, and t-shirt. On cooler days a sweatshirt and/or sweatpants may be desired, but it's up to the individual. There are several running specialty stores in our area that are very reputable.

What if I have a conflict with a meet or practice?

Contact a coach.

Am I issued a uniform or do I buy one?

Each athlete is required to purchase a team uniform that can be used for cross country and track for multiple seasons. You are responsible for keeping your uniform clean and presentable. We also offer several spirit wear or team gear at the beginning of the season. This is at your discretion to purchase. We encourage everyone to get a t-shirt, but it's NOT MANDATORY!

How can parents be involved in our team?

Parents can help in the following ways:

Volunteer on the XC Parent Crew

Work the HOME MEETS (scoring, timing, course marshal)

CHEER everyone along