

A Parent's Guide To Running Rockets Cross Country

What is Cross Country?

The Sport of Cross Country is a competitive team sport offered in the fall for students in grades 7 through 12. Training and optional group runs starts in the early summer. Teams consist of five or more runners who all race together at the same time with other teams. The top five finishers from each team are scored and their finishing places are added up for the team score. The lowest score wins. High school races are 3.1 miles long, while junior high races are usually 2 miles. Youth races are usually between 1 mile and 3 kilometers. The courses are mostly run across grassy fields, wooded paths, and have a mixture of hills and some courses include creek crossings and log jumps to make it interesting!

A great thing about cross country (*abbreviated XC*) is that **everyone competes!** Everyone runs the same course, and although the first 7 runners to finish are considered the scoring team, at every meet **ALL** athletes get to participate. There are **no cuts**, and **no bench** to sit on and watch while others play!

Our philosophy is fairly simple:

- *Everyone is important, unique, and contributes*
- *To strive for excellence is as worthy as achieving it*
- *Everyone can reach for their personal best*
- *We can have fun, train hard, and race well*
- *We want to inspire a love of running*

Everyone is Important It is a team wide philosophy that every athlete is vital to the success of the program. Keeping this in mind, running ability is actually one of the less important traits we look for. Regardless of whether you are at the front of the pack or somewhere in the middle, you play an important role on the team.

Striving for Excellence Each person brings their own set of skills and abilities to the sport. Our goal is to assist each runner to achieve the most out of their skills.

Opportunities Training programs are tailored and feedback from athletes is valued. The coaches work with each athlete both as an individual and as part of the team to help both maximize their potential.

Let's Have Fun We run different places, different routes, and we have special days where we do something out of the ordinary, just to change things up a little.

Inspire a Love of Running Running is something that can be done by everyone for the rest of their life. We seek to inspire people to run not just for competitive fitness, but also for good health, stress relief, and to enjoy the great outdoors!

How Cross Country is Scored

A cross country meet is scored by each team adding up the places of its top 5 finishers. As in golf, the low score wins. For example, a team that scores 26 points places ahead of a team that scores 29 points, as follows:

<u>Running Rockets</u>					<u>Tallmadge Youth</u>				
	1	2	4	3					
					5	7			
					6	8	10	9	
<hr/>					<hr/>				
Score	26				Score	29			

(Running Rockets Win!)

A team's 6th and 7th place finishers can also figure in the scoring if they place ahead of the other teams' top 5 finishers. When that is the case, they become "pushers" by pushing up their opponents' scores. Only a team's 6th and 7th finishers can be "pushers", regardless of how many of its runners may finish ahead of an opposing team's top 5 finishers.

What it takes to be successful

More than anything else, success in Cross Country takes time...time to learn; time to train; time to sleep, rest and recover; after school time; weekend time; time away from family and friends; and time away from other interests. With the academic responsibilities of being a student, most student-athletes are busy all the time. We try to achieve a balance between all things while aspiring to do well in Cross Country.

How can you help your son or daughter before the season starts?

Pre-season summer training is essential to build a fitness base for intensive workouts and races during the season. As your aspiring young runner begins the first week of training, you may wonder what to expect and how you can assist him or her as a parent in terms of recovery, eating, sleeping, and mental attitude. As a rule, we don't recommend you change any aspect of your normal routine of home responsibilities, family meal planning, bedtime, and social guidelines. A normal consequence of beginning to train is muscle soreness, which will soon go away. If your son or daughter has not competed in sports before, this may persist up to 2 weeks. They should communicate this to us so we can adjust their training. Any athlete engaged in intensive training and competition can be subject to injury. We can prevent most injuries when our runners tell us about their aches and pains before they become disabling, so we can have them treated by one of our coaches. A nutritious, well balanced diet is essential for an athlete. Especially on race days, fatty and fried foods, and carbonated or acidic drinks should be avoided. Small portions of easily digested food eaten at least 3 hours before competition are best, but water intake should never be limited. Most athletes feel best when they race a little hungry. You should see your runners gradually starting to eat more carbohydrates.

How to Buy Running Shoes

If possible, go to a store that deals primarily with running footwear and apparel such as *Ritchie's Sporting Goods in Tallmadge*. These stores have experienced runners as sales persons who can help you choose the right shoe with the right fit for your athlete. If you need a list of stores that deal with this type of footwear, please contact one of the coaches. The best way to prolong the life and function of a new pair of running shoes is to wear them for running only, not as school shoes or for PE class. It is not necessary to purchase special running apparel. Loose fitting T-shirts and shorts are adequate for daily training, and your athlete will be issued a school uniform and warm-ups.

Cross Country Vocabulary

- INVITATIONAL MEET...a multi-team meet
- TOP 7...the scoring members of a Cross Country Team
- COURSE...the marked and measured route of the race
- STARTING BOX...designated area to which a team is assigned on the starting line
- FALSE START...leaving the starting line before the gun sounds
- FINISH CHUTE...a rope bordered funnel past the finish line that moves runners into their single file order of finish.
- PACE...running speed over a particular distance
- SURGE...a tactical increase in pace during the race
- KICK...a burst of speed at the finish of the race
- PACK...a group of runners in close proximity
- PERSONAL RECORD (PR)...best ever performance on a given course.
- WARM-UP...a running and stretching routine that gradually warms up the body for intense running.
- COOL-DOWN...a jogging/walking routine that allows the muscles to purge themselves of lactates and the body to gradually lower its temperature to normal.
- WORKOUT...a daily training session

Preparing to watch your first cross country meet

When you arrive at the meet, ask us to see a map of the course. First, locate the start and finish, then try to scout central points where you can see as much of the race with as little moving around as possible. Do not expect the attention of your son or daughter once we get to the meet. The athletes need time to warm up on the course, be briefed by their coaches, and prepare for the race with their teammates. Many parents are initially surprised at the seriousness their son and daughter shows prior to and during a race. The intensity of competition may reveal a side of your young athlete's personality you haven't seen before.

During the race, you can move from point to point along the course to cheer the runners as they pass. Be careful, however, to stay off the runners' path and out of their way. Rules also forbid running alongside a competitor to pace or encourage him or her.

At the finish of the race, the runners file through the finish chute. It's OK to greet them then, but they may have to turn a place card into their coach ASAP so scores can be tabulated. Our runners have other responsibilities after the race. We expect them to jog and cool-down as a team and actively support their teammates who have yet to race. Some runners are more spent than others after a race. Typical symptoms of their effort and fatigue are breathlessness, general weakness, rubbery legs, glassy eyes, salivating, and sometimes nausea. A mistake parents sometimes make is to take their sons or daughters off by themselves to try and take care of them. **Please do not do this!** Our

coaches are experienced in dealing with these symptoms, trained in first-aid, and responsible for their care. To aid recovery, water is the best thing to drink immediately after a race.

Expect the possibility of some disappointment by your athlete after the race if his or her team did not win, and/or if he or she failed to achieve all goals. Athletes may need some emotional space afterward from both you and their coaches. Later on, they will need verbal support rather than criticism.

Parent Involvement

Remember that children imitate the actions of adults. If you as a parent are not involved in the program do not expect your child to be. We have a number of areas that we need parents to give their time and energy in order that we maintain our level of success such as helping with home meets, team dinners, fundraisers, hauling equipment to meets, and driving to practices not at the school. We want our athletes, parents and coaches working together all year long.

This program is a lot of fun to be around. Please make the time to be with our team and make yourself known to the athletes, coaches and other parents. Take it one step at a time, slowly but with enthusiasm and effort. Please feel free to call upon the coaches at any time. **Without parent support any Cross Country program could not do all the things that need to be done each season. Parental support is an important contribution to having a successful season!**