

A Parent's/Guardian's Guide to Cross-Country



Welcome! Your son(s) and/or daughter(s) has joined the Troy Cross-Country Team!

What is Cross-Country?

The sport of Cross-Country is a competitive team sport offered in the fall for students in grades 5 through 8. Training and optional group runs start 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! Middle school/junior high races are two miles long for the 7th and 8th graders, while 5th and 6th graders are usually one mile. Depending on ability level, 5th and 6th grade runners may be asked to move up to the two mile races. The courses are mostly run across grassy fields, wooded paths, and have a mixture of hills and some courses include creek crossings.

A great thing about Cross-Country (abbreviated XC) is that **everyone competes!** Everyone runs the same course, and although the first seven runners to finish are considered the scoring team, at most meets, **ALL** athletes get to participate. There are not any cuts and or a 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.

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!

Team and Individual Successes - Over the past several years, Troy has qualified teams to the state meet on the boys' and girls' sides. We have nine state championships, and thirty-six finishes in the top four teams.

How Cross-Country is Scored

A cross-country meet is scored by each team adding the places of its top five 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>Troy</u>		<u>Minooka</u>
1		2
4		3
5		7
6		8
10		9
<hr/>		<hr/>
26	SCORES	29

(Troy wins!!)

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

How can you help your athlete during the season?

We have programs provided for experienced runners while younger or new runners are given more basic and appropriate programs to follow as a guide. As your aspiring young runners begin the first week of training, you may wonder what to expect and how you can assist him or her as a parent/guardian in terms of recovery, eating, sleeping, and mental attitude. As a rule, we do not recommend you change any aspects 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 two 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 three 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 runner 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. 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.

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: leave 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: a 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

Racing flats: special, lightweight shoes designed for racing, rather than daily training

Training flats: running shoes designed for long wear in daily training

Warm-up: a running and stretching routine that gradually warms up the body for intense running

Cool down: a jogging/walking routing 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 athlete(s) once we get to the meet. Runners will need time to warm-up on the course, be briefed by their coaches, and prepare for the race with their teammates. Many parents/guardians are initially surprised at the seriousness their son or daughter shows prior to and during a race. The intensity of competition may reveal a side of your young athlete's personality that 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 is okay 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, crying, and sometimes nausea. A mistake parents/guardians sometimes make is to take their athlete off by themselves to try and take care of him/her. **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/her team did not win and/or your athlete failed to achieve all time goals. Athletes may need some emotional space afterward from both you and their coaches. Later on, they will need verbal support rather than criticism.

Once an away meet is over, if your athlete(s) came on our bus, please do not let the runner(s) go home with you without signing out with a coach first. We are legally bound by state law for athletes' safe transport to and from the meet.

Also, students cannot typically leave right away after their race is over, unless they have a pressing commitment (band, other activity, etc.). Please tell the coaches before taking your child. We often have information to provide runners afterwards and again, we want everyone to stay and support their teammates.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

Remember that children imitate the actions of adults. If you, as a parent/guardian, are not involved in the program, do not expect your athlete(s) to be. We have a number of areas that we need parents/guardians to give their time and energy in order that we maintain our level of success, such as helping with home meets. We want our athletes, parents/guardians, and coaches working together all season long. Feel free to come to any of the practices and run with the group.

The 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 families. All those who have truly been involved over the years have always walked away raving about the great experience they had. 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/guardian support, any cross-country program could not do all the things that need to be done each season. Your support is an important contribution to having a successful season!

