

Plano Senior High School Cross Country Booster Club Cross Country Primer for Parents of Student Athletes

The Sport

Cross Country is primarily a team sport where individual accomplishment is also rewarded. A group of individuals, running as a team, are trying to run faster than the competition and achieve the highest overall performance.

The sport of Cross Country mirrors its name. It is not run on a track but over a course that may be grass and/or dirt, sometimes sidewalks and/or paths, sometimes hilly or flat and sometimes over rocks and through mud. Weather conditions, course conditions, race tactics and the will to succeed all play important roles in final performance. Most runners enjoy a course that is not repetitive and is challenging.

Cross country is not always a prime spectator sport. Many times you will see the runners off at the starting line... a sea of flailing arms and legs... but as colorful as the rainbow... and not see them again until they're coming into the finish chute. Sometimes you may see them three or four times as they come running by. Each course layout is different which keeps each race unique, new, and interesting.

The Season

The season is run over an 11 week period...consisting of weekly meets. Most meets are run on Saturday morning. Race sites vary weekly depending on the host school. Each host school selects the race site and the race course. The first 7 to 8 weeks of the season are used to ready the teams and to build experience to compete in the District meet. The top three teams advance as well as the top 10 individual runners. ..onto the Regional meet...where again the top three teams and top 10 individuals advance to the State Meet. So the season is a prelude to the last three meets of the season. These are the meets where you determine the success of the season.

The Teams

The Boys' and Girls' teams each field two squads - a Varsity and a Junior Varsity (JV). The Varsity consists of up to 7 runners, as selected by the Coach. The remaining runners make up the JV. The size of the Varsity team is limited as generally a varsity race only allows 7 runners per team. The make-up of the Varsity team can change throughout the season as runners develop and improve. Each week the Coach lets the runners know who will be running on the Varsity team that week. The JV season ends with the District meet as only the Varsity competes at the Region and the State meets.

The Meets

The team travels to the meet together. The exception to that is the Plano Invitational where the runners get their own transportation to that meet since it is held in the city of Plano. The Coaches will tell the runners when and where to meet on the morning of the competition. The teams will get to the meet site in plenty of time to stretch, warm up and get familiar with the course. The runners may walk or jog the course beforehand to become familiar with its layout. Our Tent Masters get to the meet site even earlier than the team and have our Plano Wildcats tent in place for our runners. This becomes particularly important on days where weather is less than desirable... hot and sunny and/or cold, windy and raining.

Meets consist of multiple races. Runners are separated by gender, team (Varsity vs. JV), and sometimes school size (6A, 5A, 4A, etc.). The order of the races are determined by the host and can change from week to week. Generally Varsity Girls race first, followed by Varsity Boys, then JV Girls, and JV Boys.

Hint #1... Don't rely on the races (after the first race) to begin at a set time. They generally start each race as the prior race finishes so times could vary especially as the day progresses.

Hint #2... Weather conditions change over the season. As the season rolls along and the weather gets cooler, make sure you take appropriate clothing. It gets windy at some of these meets... and if the weather turns nasty you'll be glad you have your coat.

Scoring

A Cross Country race is scored similar to the way golf is scored...lowest score wins. A team score is reached by adding up the finishing positions of their five (5) fastest runners. A team whose five fastest runners finish 3rd, 6th, 7th, 10th and 13th gets a score of $3+6+7+10+13 = 39$. Having only the top five per team score doesn't mean that the 6th and the 7th runners on the team have less value. Although they may not be a scoring runner, it is important for these runners to finish in front of as many of the first five runners from the other teams as possible, thus inflating the scoring of the opponent's teams. Ties are broken by looking at where the 6th runner from a particular team has finished.

Running Gear

The most important piece of running gear is a runner's shoes. Running long distance breaks down the support in running shoes and they must be replaced often to avoid injury to the runner. The first sign of an injury is often a sign that the runner's shoes are not performing adequately. Cotton socks cause blisters and should be avoided. Synthetic materials in socks complement a good pair of running shoes. Running shops specialize in outfitting runners and have experienced people fitting the proper shoe for the individual's running style and for conditions in which they run. Some local running shops that specialize in distance running are Luke's Locker and Run On.

Hydration

Student athletes running in Texas need great care in keeping hydrated. Hydration for a race may begin 24 hours or more prior to race time. Pre-hydrating allows the body to fully absorb liquids ingested. Water and electrolyte-based drinks work best. Runners should bring water bottles to training sessions and to races. Waiting until the night before or the morning of the race to hydrate will not have the desired effect.

Parents and Race Fans

The most important part after the runners' efforts... is our support, it's those words of encouragement that our runners hear as they race along that pushes them to go a little harder and allows them to do the best they can. They do appreciate it... it does make a difference. Parents and other race fans are expected to set a good example of positive encouragement and good sportsmanship. Allow the coaches to 'coach', and show up to the meets ready to cheer for our Plano Wildcats!!!

More Information

Much more information regarding cross country at Plano Senior High School and resources regarding running/training is on the Booster Club website at www.planorunning.com.