**A Parent's Guide to Cross-Country**

**What is cross-country?**

Cross-country is a team running sport that takes place in the fall on a measured 5000 meter (3.1 miles) High School course or 2 mile course for the Jr. High over varied surfaces and terrain. Our home course is located in City Park on the levee near Troy Memorial Stadium and Hobart Arena.

**How is cross-country scored?**

A cross-country meet is scored by adding up the places of the top 5 finishers for each team. 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:

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Totals: 26 pts 29pts **Troy Wins**

A team's 6th and 7th finishers can also figure in the scoring if they place ahead of other teams' top 5 finishers. When that is the case, they become "pushers" by pushing up their opponents' scores, as follows:

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Totals: 28 pts 29 pts **Troy Wins**

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. This is also known as displacing another team's scoring runner(s). This is why the 6th and 7th runners are just as important as the top 5.
What happens in case of a scoring tie?

If a tie in scoring occurs, then the team who has their 6th runner in first wins. If neither team has a 6th or 7th runner, then you break a tie based on placement of the 5th runner for each team. The team who has their 5th runner in first, wins. The score does not change, but the tie is broken and a team winner determined. This is the only way to determine the winning team in the case of a tie score.

Levels of competition / participation

In most of our meets there are separate Varsity and Junior Varsity competitions. All team members can participate in any meets during the season. In invitational meets, we are sometimes limited to 7 runners at each level depending on the meet. Some races will have an "A", "B" and sometimes a "C" varsity. Sometimes the squad will consist of a mixture of "A/B" or "B/C" team runners. The position on a squad is determined by previous race team ranking based on time and in some cases the discretion of the coach.

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; before-school time; after-school time; weekend time; time away from family and friends; and time away from other interests. It is a process that takes time. With the academic responsibilities of being a high school student, most student-athletes are busy all the time. The willingness to devote the time that success demands is called DEDICATION.

Dedication

Being a member of the Troy Women’s Cross-Country program carries other expectations and responsibilities. Doing what is expected of every team member is called COMMITMENT. Attending team practices every day is one of the commitments I expect. Your daughter has received a copy of Troy's athletic code of conduct and academic eligibility requirements. Our goal is to develop team loyalty and individual responsibility and accountability among all our team members. School sports are a wonderful vehicle for personal growth. I hope that you as parents will appreciate this and support the academic and athletic goals set forth by your daughter and the Troy City Schools.

Another expected commitment is COMMUNICATION with our coaching staff. If a problem or illness is going to force your daughter to miss practice or a meet, I expect her to tell me about it personally in advance if all possible. (This does not mean relaying a message through a teammate or friend.) Many such problems can be solved when athletes communicate directly with the coach.
How you can help your athlete before the season starts?

I strongly encourage runners to be on a training regime during the summer. Often overlooked, I consider base training to be the most important portion of the cross-country season. Pre-season summer training is essential to build a fitness base for intensive workouts and races during the season. We offer conditioning practices during the summer months. Only with a strong level of base conditioning can an athlete ever hope to reach their peak potential. Having a large base training load is comparable to putting a diesel semi-truck engine under the hood of a Porsche. In other words it allows a runner to go even faster once speedwork is introduced in the fall than otherwise would be possible due to physiological adaptations that the body goes through during consistent aerobic conditioning.

As your aspiring young runner begins the first weeks of training, you may wonder what you should expect and how you can assist her as a parent in terms of recovery, eating, sleeping, and mental attitude. As a rule, I 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 daughter has not participated in sports before, this may persist up to two weeks. She should communicate this to me so adjustments in her training load can be made. Any athlete engaged in intensive training and competition can be subject to injury. Most injuries can be prevented when runners tell me about their aches and pains before they become disabling, so they can be treated by the school athletic trainer or me. 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 foods eaten 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. If you have any questions please contact me.

Cross-Country Vocabulary

**Aerobic conditioning**- literally means with oxygen. Running pace at 60-80% of maximum effort. A runner is able to hold a conversation while running at this pace. The bulk of base training and recovery runs are done at this pace.

**Anaerobic/lactate threshold (stamina pace/effort)**- this pace is faster than aerobic conditioning, usually between 80-90% of maximum effort. Tempo runs are to be done at this pace. Conversation is difficult but short sentences/phrases can be uttered.

**Aerobic capacity (speed pace/effort)**- this pace is what most runners think of when they think of running fast. Most intervals and repeats are done at this pace (1-5 minutes). Running is done at 93-98% of maximum effort.

**Anaerobic capacity (sprint pace/effort)**- literally means without oxygen. This is extremely fast running, 100% maximum effort. Sprinting. One’s body needs more oxygen than can be supplied. Running at this pace can only be done under 1 minute.
**Fartlek** - a Swedish word which means “speed-play”. A form of loosely structured training that alternates bursts of fast running with period of easy jogging for recovery.

**Intervals** - training designed to increase the body’s tolerance of lactic acid. Running is done at faster than race pace for shorter periods of time (1-5 minutes).

**Repeats** - a workout in which there are repeated attempts to run a specified distance in a specific time or effort. Ex. Hill repeats or 400 meter repeats.

**Recovery run** - aerobic running done to recuperate from hard training days. Easy running helps remove lactic acid from a previous strenuous workout.

**Tempo run** - a 15-40 minute run at the athlete’s anaerobic threshold. Tempo runs allow the athlete to become accustomed to moderately difficult running without overly stressing the body. Usually done at 80-90% of the athlete’s maximum effort.

**Lactic acid** - a by-product of anaerobic running that accumulates in the major muscles of the legs causing extreme muscular fatigue “rubber or jelly legs” and pain. When someone “feels the burn” it is really lactic acid.

**Base training** - early season training. Most runs are done at one’s aerobic pace. The larger one’s base the better the probability that one is able to reach their peak potential at the end of the racing season. Think of a pyramid- the larger the base the higher the capstone can be.

**Peaking/tapering** - a time at the end of the season where there is a reduced volume of training to allow the athlete enough recovery to reach their best performance.

**Dual/Tri/Quad Meet** - a meet between two, three or four teams

**Invitational Meet** - a multi-team meet, usually 6 or more teams

**Negative split** - running the second half of a race/workout faster than the first half.

**Course** - the marked and measured route of a race. High school races are 5000 meters (3.1 miles) long, while junior high courses are 2 miles in length.

**Finish Chute** - a gated system, past the finish line, that runners enter into after a race.

**Stride** - pre-race warm-up routine from the starting line.

**Pace** - running speed over a particular distance, average speed per mile.

**Pack** - a group of runners in close proximity.

**Personal Record** - best-ever performance on a given course or distance (PR).
Warm-up - a running and stretching routine that prepared the body for future intense activity.

Cool-down - a running and stretching routine that lowers the body's temperature and removes lactic acid from the legs.

Preparing to watch a cross-country meet

Race itineraries have been provided with directions to the meet and race times. Thank Coach Campbell at some point during the season for this helpful packet of information. When you arrive at the meet site, 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 as possible. Many schools share the same color uniforms. In Miami County alone, Troy, Tipp City, and Milton-Union all have red and white uniforms so, try to observe the differences while teams are warming up before the start. Invitational meets often involve many races in one day that may include high school, junior high, open, and elementary races. Make sure you know what race(s) Troy athletes are participating in.

Do not expect a great deal of attention from your daughter once we get to the meet. The runners need to warm up on the course, be briefed by the coaches, and prepare for the race with their teammates. Many parents are surprised at the seriousness their daughter shows prior to and during a race. The intensity of competition may reveal a side of your daughter's personality you haven't seen before. Don't misinterpret this intensity, each athlete handles it in her own way.

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 her. Runners may be disqualified if aided in this manner. Please don't let your enthusiasm allow you to forget the rules.

At the finish of the race, the runners file through a finish chute. Often they will have to turn in a place card to the coaches immediately after leaving the finish chute so the team score can be tabulated. If the coaches can't find an athlete after a race, we can't help them if they need medical attention, or get their place card to turn in to the scores table. Our runners have other responsibilities after the race as well. 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 fatigued than others after a race. Typical symptoms of their effort and fatigue are breathlessness, general weakness, pale or flush skin, rubbery legs, glassy eyes, salivating, and sometimes nausea. A mistake parents sometimes make is to take their runner off by themselves to try to take care of them. Please do not do this. Most meets have medical staff on site. Coaches are also experienced in dealing with these symptoms and trained in first-aid. To aid recovery, water is the best thing to drink immediately after a race.
Expect the possibility of some disappointment by your athlete after a race if her team did not win, and/or failed to achieve all their goals. Many athletes 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 came on our bus, please do not take them home with you without first filling out the consent of release from located at the team camp. We are legally bound by state law for athletes' safe transport to and from the meet. You need to know that Troy High School athletes are not allowed to drive themselves to a meet, and afterward, I can release them only to you, but not a brother or sister.

Without parent support the Troy Cross Country program cannot do all the things we do each season. Your support is what the program needs to be successful!