



# A Parent's Guide to Cross Country

## Augusta Independent Schools Cross Country Program

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Welcome! Your son or daughter has joined the Augusta Cross Country Team.

### **WHAT IS CROSS COUNTRY?**

The Sport of Cross Country is a competitive team sport offered in the fall. While students are encouraged to run individually throughout the month of June, official practices start in July for middle school and high school teams. Cross Country teams consist of five or more runners who all race together at the same time against 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. If a team has less than five runners, then those runners compete as individuals and cannot compete for team awards. High school races are 3.1 miles long, while middle school races range from 1.5 to 2.5 miles, depending on the meet. The courses are mostly run across grassy fields, wooded paths, and have a mixture of hills and flat terrain. All courses are different; some are very flat; some are very hilly.

A great thing about cross country (abbreviated XC or CC) is that everyone competes! Everyone runs the same course, and although the first 7 runners to finish are considered the scoring team, at almost every meet, ALL athletes get to participate.

### **TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL SUCCESSES**

Cross country is unique in that there is both a team element but also a very clear individual element. We have sent two teams to the state championship meet: 2017 boys team and our 2020 Region Championship team. In most other years, at least one runner has qualified and competed in the state championship since 2012. We have also had several first-place finishes in both middle school and high school races. In 2015 and 2016, we have had runners go on to compete in the national Cross Country Coaches National Youth Championship races, among other national races.

### **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. With the academic responsibilities of being a student as well, 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.

We strongly emphasize academic excellence. We regularly have team GPAs in the 3.6-3.8 range. Our team's school attendance is normally above 97%. The willingness to devote the time that success demands in the classroom and the sport of cross country is called DEDICATION.

Being a member of the Augusta Cross Country Team 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 we expect. At the start of each season, each student/parent will receive a form outlining the team rules and policies. Our goal is to develop team loyalty, individual responsibility, and accountability among all our team members. School-based athletics are wonderful vehicles for personal growth. We hope that you as parents will appreciate this and support our goals.

Another commitment we expect is COMMUNICATION with our coaching staff. If a problem or illness is going to force your son or daughter to miss practice or a meet, we expect him or her to tell us about it personally in advance. (This does not mean relaying a message through a teammate or friend.) Many such problems can be solved when athletes communicate with us.

You will find that because team practices and races consume so many hours, your child's training and racing will leave little extra time beyond what is needed for homework, eating and sleeping. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Your child will need to manage his/her time better. This usually results in less time in front of the computer and TV. The discipline of balancing school activities and a team sport help develop time management skills that will last a lifetime.

### **HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER BEFORE THE SEASON STARTS?**

We strongly encourage our runners to follow a training regimen during the summer starting after Memorial Day. Younger or new runners are given basic and appropriate programs to follow as a guide. 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. If unusual soreness occurs during the season, runners should communicate this to the coaches so we can adjust their training. Any athlete engaged in intensive training and competition can be subject to injury. We can prevent many injuries when our runners tell us about their aches and pains before they become disabling.

### **RUNNING SHOES / CLOTHES**

It is up to the parents what types of shoes they want their child to wear. There are special running shoes, that contain spikes, for cross country races, although some parents of new runners will just start off with basic running shoes. If possible, go to a store that deals primarily with running footwear and apparel such as Tri-State Running Company in Edgewood, KY. These stores typically have experienced runners as sales persons who can help you choose the right shoe with the right fit for your athlete.

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 important that shoes be selected for their function, not their pretty colors!

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 for races, although they may elect to wear compression tops or shorts/pants. Most sporting goods stores have these items, as does Wal-Mart. There are color guidelines on what runners can wear. This information is given to athletes at the beginning of each season.

Some online options (not endorsements) for purchasing running shoes:

[www.eastbay.com](http://www.eastbay.com)

<http://www.saucony.com/en/mens-competition-cross-country/>

<http://www.firsttothefinish.com/>

## COMMUNICATION

We try to keep our parents and runners up-to-date on information. We send home a regular newsletters during the season that contains all the necessary meet information: the time the bus leaves, when the races begin, the location of the meet, when we expect to return home, etc. We also post information regularly on our Facebook page (search Augusta Independent Cross Country / Track & Field) and on our Twitter (AugustaXC\_Track).

## PREPARING TO ATTEND YOUR FIRST CROSS COUNTRY MEET

When you arrive at the meet, 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. Typically, if there's some sort of rope line or barrier, only coaches are permitted beyond that point. Some meets only allow coaches on the course. **Rules also forbid running alongside a competitor to pace or encourage him or her. This can lead to the runner being disqualified.**

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. After they've composed themselves, runners need to do a cool-down jog and stretch thoroughly. We expect them to actively support their teammates who have yet to race.

Some runners are more tired 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. It's advised to initially keep them near the finish line where water is available and where there is often a trainer. 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 he/she didn't perform as well as he/she expected. Athletes may need some emotional space afterward from both you and their coaches. Later, they will need verbal support rather than criticism.

Once a meet is over, if your son or daughter came on our bus, please do not take him or her home with you without signing him/her out. Transportation forms are typically kept in our team binder, which the team manager keeps during our meets.

You need to know that high school athletes are not allowed to drive themselves to a meet unless pre-approved due to special circumstances, and afterward, we can release them only to you. If they will need to leave with someone else, that requires approval the Principal or Athletic Director at least one day before the meet. Also, students cannot typically leave right away after their race is over, unless they have a pressing commitment (band competition, ACT, family engagement, etc.) Award ceremonies are typically held at the end of the meet and if possible, we prefer our athletes to stay and support their teammates.

### **HOW CROSS COUNTRY IS SCORED**

A cross country meet is scored by each team adding up the places of its top 5 finishers. (Runners not on a "full team" are skipped in the points. 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:

Augusta	St. Pat	Mason Co.
1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12
13	14	15
Score 35	Score 40	Score 45

Augusta wins

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.

### **NUTRITION**

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.

## **CROSS COUNTRY VOCABULARY**

- INVITATIONAL MEET ... usually a larger meet that gives awards
- ALL-COMERS ... usually smaller meets that do not give awards
- 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 by an athlete at a certain race distance
- 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