

A Parent's Handbook to Cross Country

Congratulations! Your son or daughter has joined the Yorba Linda High School Cross Country Team.

WHAT IS CROSS COUNTRY?

Cross country (XC) is a team running sport that takes place in the fall on a measured 3-mile loop over varied surfaces and terrain. Cross country meets are held on dirt trails, park grounds and sometimes, even golf courses.

In an attempt to help you better understand what your son or daughter will be doing this fall, the coaches have put together this handbook with everything both the athlete and the parent should know. This handbook will be especially important for all the athletes to read as it gives insight to the goals of our season and the coaches' expectations for all team members.

It is the coaches' hope that you, the parent, will embrace what your student athlete is preparing to do and you are highly encouraged to get involved with us in any way you can. This could involve providing snacks, transporting the runners to training locations off campus, enjoying a run with the team or coming to our meets to support your hard working son and daughter. In doing so, your runner will hopefully be able to better reach their potential and enjoy our cross country team and their high school experience to the fullest.

YLHS CROSS COUNTRY MISSION STATEMENT

We are committed to developing outstanding student athletes both on and off the running trails. We believe our athletes should strive for excellence in the classroom, be positive role models on campus, understand how to set realistic goals, and then be dedicated enough to achieve them.

As coaches we understand that every athlete on the Yorba Linda High School cross country team has unique talents and abilities. We ask that every athlete work hard to maximize their potential. It is further our mission to ensure each of our student athletes continue to maintain a level of fitness as part of their lifestyle after graduating from Yorba Linda High School.

YLHS COACHING PHILOSOPHIES:

1. *Maintain a safe, healthy and caring environment, which stresses excellence, dedication, sacrifice and hard work as the basis for success, both in the sport and in life.*
2. *Understanding that being a member of a team is a **privilege not a right**. As such, each student athlete must abide by the rules and guidelines as set forth by our school administration, CIF, and your coaches.*
3. *All student athletes must be academically eligible (2.0) at the start of the season and maintain that eligibility.*
4. *All student athletes deserve the best coaching that we can provide. ALL team members deserve competent and meaningful coaching, which always takes into account individual strengths and weaknesses.*
5. *All student athletes deserve a chance to compete at every possible meet as long as they are attending practices and doing the work prescribed by your coaches.*
6. *Coaches and student athletes have a responsibility to be role models and ambassadors for our school.*
7. *Coaches and student athletes have the responsibility to live a healthy lifestyle; void of drugs and alcohol.*
8. *Coaches and student athletes must at all times use appropriate and non-abusive language.*
9. *Positive energy and a positive attitude are the keys to a successful team. Each of us will strive to always look for the good in every circumstance even in those cases where the outcome falls short of the desired result. We will always remain supportive of each other as teammates.*
10. *No individual, coach or student athlete is more important than the team. Therefore, no one will receive any special treatment regardless of ability.*
11. *Everyone on the team is expected to put the best interest of the team first before any thought is given to individual accomplishments.*
12. *Team pride is a cornerstone of a competitive athletic program. Winning builds pride, but so does hard work and commitment to individual and team goals.*
13. *We will work to instill in each student athlete the belief that hard work pays off. While winning is nice, each athlete will focus on his/her effort--not just the outcome.*
14. *Our coaching philosophy does understand that cross country should be **FUN**. There is a time for fun (before we pull together as a team for warm-ups) and a time to get serious (every other moment until we team stretch following our cool down). Understanding when each is appropriate is the key to being a successful team.*

15. Finally, your coaches will strive to make your Yorba Linda High School cross country team experience something that will always provide positive lifelong memories for every student athlete on one of our teams.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The sport of high school cross country is unique in that it is a fall season sport (September through November) but the majority of the training to be successful takes place in the summer. Therefore, we, as coaches, strongly encourage our runners to run, lift weights or cross train every day except Sunday during the summer. Summer training is a must for the cross country athlete. It will build a running base so they are fully prepared for the tougher workouts that will start beginning in August. This training is also essential to help prevent typical running injuries that occur if the athlete doesn't have a sufficient running base.

To this end, YLHS cross country provides a summer camp to help our athletes complete their preparation for the season in a structured and well supervised summer camp environment. Our camp begins in early July and runs throughout the summer until the start of school in the fall and the beginning of our cross country season. Additionally, for those elite varsity athletes, we offer a high-altitude training camp in Big Bear in mid-August (specific dates TBD). This began two years ago, and it was found to be a great way to celebrate the hard work done over the summer, bond as a team, and to fine tune the athletes' fitness levels so they are prepared for the season ahead. These elite athletes generally will be our varsity runners. If your son or daughter is unable to attend our summer camp, the coaches highly recommend that your son or daughter train on their own. Prior to the start of school, the coaches will conduct a time trial for those athletes that trained on their own. The purpose of this TT is to ensure the potential runner is able to safely begin training with the rest of the team in regards to running mileage and pace. It is important to assess their running level as our first invitational takes place the first week of school.

In order to avoid the heat of the day and to enable as much flexibility with normal summer routines, our summer camp hours are generally from 7 am until 9 am six days a week with Sunday being our day of rest. At the beginning for our incoming freshman athletes, there will be a few more days off as we slowly bring up their running mileage. For the first few weeks, we will practice at Yorba Regional Park (YRP), meeting near the softball fields.

YRP trails provide a flat, soft terrain that will ease our newest runners to the rigors of the sport. Besides running, we will spend time diligently stretching and working on our strength and core conditioning as a team.

HOW CAN I HELP MY SON OR DAUGHTER BEFORE THE SEASON STARTS?

As a rule, don't change any aspect of their normal daily routine. Everything should remain the same in terms of home responsibilities, appropriate rest, eating, and social habits. We will be spending time talking about nutritional needs as a distance athlete. Your son or daughter may even ask you to buy slightly different foods for them to supplement their training program. As distance athletes, they will be burning additional calories by running the miles on their schedule. Therefore, replacing the fuel to their bodies will be an important aspect of keeping them healthy.

You should also be aware as a parent that a common result of beginning training may be sore muscles. The soreness should soon go away. If your young athlete does not have much background in running, some of this soreness may persist for up to two weeks. As experienced coaches, we will be looking for signs of injury from our athletes. They will be encouraged to share with the coaching staff any persistent aches or pains that are not going away. We will adjust their workout schedules to help them recover quicker. However, any athlete in intensive training could be subject to an injury. All concerns regarding injuries should be addressed by contacting the coaches, our trainer, or your physician. Generally speaking, the injuries usually involve their shins (front of the lower leg), Achilles (back of lower leg to the calf), knee or foot pain. All these types of injuries are common, and with the right course of treatment can be minimized or eliminated.

As we mentioned earlier, a well-balanced diet is an asset for your young athlete. Eating the right foods before a hard workout or on meet days is extremely important. Fried foods, foods high in fat, eggs, and both carbonated and acidic beverages should be avoided before a workout. Take advantage of easily digestible foods in lower quantities. Water intake should be a priority. Generally, the last time your son or daughter should eat is 1 to 2 hours prior to a workout.

Your athlete will learn their own eating routines before races. Gradually you will see your young athlete progress toward a diet that is high in carbohydrates (wheat bread, pasta, vegetables, fruits, rice) as this is an extremely good source of fuel for their body.

WHAT ELSE WILL WE NEED TO CONSIDER BUYING?

Shoes—let's start with the basics. A good pair of running shoes is essential. Most injuries are caused by running in old, worn out shoes. This is the one investment that will help your athlete stay healthy. I would recommend purchasing their shoes at a specialty running store, especially their first pair of shoes. Stores like Road Runner Sports in Costa Mesa or Snail's Pace in Brea have experts that will analyze your son or daughters' foot strike peculiarities to ensure they are purchasing the right type of shoe for their running gait. Once you are familiar with the type of shoe your athlete needs, you can then go anywhere to buy the shoe best made for their running style. Wherever you go, ensure a knowledgeable salesperson looks at their feet and helps you make a good decision based on size, width, running style, and type of running (training vs. racing). For a beginning runner, training shoes are all you need right now. Racing flats will come later if you desire.

Four good hints on purchasing a new shoe:

1. The right shoe will usually feel the best on your feet.
2. It helps to buy a good shoe. It doesn't have to be the most expensive, but sometimes the cheap shoe causes more problems than it saves. Consider this; most shoes that are on sale generally are marked down because they are not selling. They usually do not sell because they don't feel good for a majority of runners.
3. Make sure that you have some room in the toe-box of the shoe for your feet. A good general rule is to buy a half size bigger than your street shoes. This allows for both growth and your feet swelling.
4. Important, running shoes should be worn only for running. Don't wear your running shoes as play shoes. Running shoes need to be monitored for wear as most injuries occur once running shoes stop absorbing the foot strikes effectively. Most times you cannot look at a shoe and tell if it needs to be replaced. 200 to 300 miles is the guideline for replacing shoes. This might be one full season of cross country or for some athlete's, the summer. We, as coaches, always look at the shoes our athletes are wearing. If your son or daughter tells you the coaches are recommending replacement of their shoes, please heed our advice.

Clothing—It is not necessary to purchase specific running clothing. Race uniforms will be issued at the start of the season for meets and invitationals. Daily practice clothing should be loose fitting t-shirts and shorts. Clean, dry (non-cotton) socks will help prevent blisters, fungus, and other foot problems.

Students will be given sweat tops and bottoms as part of their uniform for colder weather. Please be aware that these are for practice only and not to be worn around as casual clothing. **If they lose them, they will be required to pay to replace them.**

Watches—our training method utilizes GPS watches for our running pace groups. If your athlete owns a GPS watch and wants to wear it to practice, that is fine. It isn't necessary, however, to purchase a running watch for practice or for meets. If you decide to buy a watch, usually these can be purchased at stores for as little as \$20- \$40 (non GPS).

HOW IS A CROSS COUNTRY MEET SCORED?

Low Score Wins: As in golf, the object in cross country is to compete for the lowest score possible. In other words, a team that scores 35 points places ahead of a team that scores 40 points. This means that when two or more teams are competing, the first place team has the lowest score, the second place team has the second lowest score, and the third place team has the third lowest score and so on.

Scores Are Based on the Top Five Finishers -- Although seven athletes from each team compete at the varsity level and as many runners as a team has can compete at lower levels—e.g., girls frosh/soph, boys junior varsity—only the first five finishers are counted in determining a teams' score. For instance, let's say YLHS's first five finishers place 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8 in a meet against Valencia. Valencia's first five finishers, in turn, place 2, 6, 7, 9, 11. This will illustrate 2 points:

(A) low score wins, and (B) what is called displacement. Let's take a look.

A. Low Score Wins: YLHS Wins!

YLHS	Valencia
1	2
3	6
4	7
5	9
8	11
21	35

B. Displacement—In looking at the scoring above, it may have occurred to you that the 10th finisher does not show up in the scoring. What happened to him? First, it is clear that he was a YLHS runner because if he ran for Valencia, he would have been their 5th finisher and earned them 10 points instead of 11. Second, it logically follows that although he does not figure directly in the scoring, he does figure indirectly in that he caused Valencia to lose one additional point more than it would have without him, i.e., he has displaced a Valencia runner. Obviously, in close meets displacing can make the difference between winning and losing; hence the 6th and 7th runners on the team are just as important as the 1st. While it is exciting and helpful to have a star runner or two on a cross country team, cross country is still a team sport and depends very much on the performance of the other 5-6 runners on the team.

Coaches Note: In the event a race ends in a tie, the winner is determined by the position of the #6 runner from both teams. The team with the better sixth runner wins.

What About Invitationals—In an invitational and similar cross country competition—e.g., Woodbridge Invitational—a great many teams run against each other in a given race. Once again, it's still low score that wins and only the first five finishers for each team count in the scoring. Furthermore, at the varsity level, each team may still enter only its top seven runners in a varsity race. Therefore, at the varsity level, scoring in an invitational is exactly like scoring in a dual. In some invitationals, the format is based on a grade level format—seniors vs. seniors, juniors vs. juniors, etc.

League Preview Meets and League Finals—These are the only two races that count towards a league championship or league placing. The top four teams in league finals will continue on to compete in CIF. Only the varsity teams have an opportunity to race in CIF. Each race is scored differently. In the preview meet, all teams in the Empire League compete against each other at the same time. However as noted above in scoring, each team scores against each individual team. Each win against an opposing team counts as 1 point. Invitational scoring is used for League Finals and each win is worth 2 points. It will all make more sense once you are involved for a meet or two.

Results—Most results will be recorded and summarized. The results will be emailed to the athletes and parents for you to review. We also subscribe to a website site called xcstats.com where all your athletes’ results by event will be captured and stored for all four years. It is a great tool for them to compare their results to other athletes that are currently on the team or competed at YLHS years before. The athletes love playing with all the data this website offers. We will provide you sign up instructions as we get closer to the season beginning. Also, we have great parent photographers who document each event in pictures and put them up on our team website for your enjoyment.

Awards—Awards/medals are usually given at an invitational meet. How deep the medals go per race can vary considerably. Individual awards may be given in a finish chute, after each race is completed, or at the end of the meet. No awards are given out at our league preview meet. In the league finals meet, top 10 varsity finishers are awarded patches and receive All League honors.

Our Competition:

CIF Southern Section Div. III

Boys: Crestview League Girls: North Hills League

Schools in the Crestview and North Hills beside YLHS

Canyon	El Dorado	Villa Park
Foothill	Brea Olinda	El Modena

PREPARING TO WATCH YOUR FIRST CROSS COUNTRY MEET

When you arrive at the meet site, you may be asked to help assemble the team’s pop up tent or assist in other ways. Once our site is secured, ask to see a map of the course. We generally set up by the start/ finish line. Ask some veteran parents for the best locations to view the race without moving around too much. At some races that will not be possible. Be aware that we competing in 6 levels of racing; varsity boys, varsity girls, JV boys, JV girls, Frosh/Soph boys, and Frosh/Soph girls. Your athlete will know which level they will be racing early in the week and will have been told the time their race is scheduled to start.

The team will travel to our invitationals and meets together by bus. Do not expect the attention of your son or daughter once they get to the meet. The athletes need time to view the course, warm up properly, be briefed by their coaches, and prepare for their race with their teammates. Many parents are initially surprised at the seriousness their son or daughter shows prior to the start of their race. The intensity of the competition may reveal a side of your young athlete's personality you haven't seen before.

During the race, you can move around from point to point along the course to cheer runners as they pass. Be careful to stay off the race course and impede other athletes racing. Rules also forbid running alongside a competitor to pace or encourage him or her.

At the finish of the race, the runners file through a finish chute. It's okay to greet them there, but they may have to concentrate on the instructions given by the finish line person. We expect them to meet as a team immediately following their race to debrief and then they will need to cool-down as a team. Some runners are more spent at the end of a race than others. 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 son or daughter off by themselves to try and take care of them. **Please do not do this!** Your 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 he or she did not meet their desired outcome for the race. Athletes may need some emotional space afterwards from both their coaches and their parents. Later on, they will need verbal support, not criticism from you.

Your athlete is required to come to our meets on the school bus. You may take your son or daughter home from the meet provided you have given your coaches a signed note requesting your athlete be released into your custody. We are legally responsible for all the athletes' safe transport to and from our meets. Thank you in advance for cooperating with us in this important safety regard.

Here is one parents' guide to successfully surviving a high school XC meet or invitational:

YLHS Cross Country's Top 10 List

In the spirit of **David Letterman's "Top 10 Lists"**, we thought the following items would be beneficial for all YLHS Cross Country Boosters to be made aware of *before* the season officially begins. ***Go Mustangs!***

#10 **Shoes are critical.** This is critical for comfort throughout the meet as a spectator. Don't wear your favorite heels, sandals, or dress shoes after work.

#9 **Bring a chair.** You will spend much of your time at the YLHS XC encampment and will enjoy sitting in your own chair before and after your child's race.

#8 **Time frame.** Don't ask your student how long an event will take. No one seems to know for sure how long these events go. Some may finish quickly, while others are daylong events.

#7 **Bring your own snack/coffee/water.** Snacks provided by the parents are for the team only. This also includes younger siblings, sorry. Some events have snack bars available, but many do not. A small cooler is encouraged.

#6 **Fees to some events.** Some events charge entrance fees and parking. Cash in hand is always a good idea. Some events also sell race t-shirts and running equipment.

#5 **Race websites.** It's always a good idea to visit the race website prior to the event. Maps, course information, previous year's times, parking, and a variety of important information can be learned from a few minutes at the computer the day prior. We hope to link all available sites from ours.

#4 **Team scoring.** The top 5 finishers from each school compete for a lowest score. (This area is still a little confusing, so just trust the coaches and athletes to know.) Stay away from the results table. That's coach's job.

#3 **The elements.** We are outdoors, in hilly, rough, muddy, wet, rocky, sandy, hot, foggy weather. Wear sun block, a hat, sunglasses, bring a sweatshirt, and maybe even binoculars to best enjoy the sport.

#2 **Bodily functions.** Things don't always wait until the end of the race to happen. Try not to be too unnerved if such an event happens to your runner during a race. Encourage an early routine trip to the facilities before race time. It is always good to be prepared with an extra change of dry clothes just in case.

And finally, the #1 Cross Country Tip...

#1 **DO NOT CROSS THE COURSE DURING A RACE!** Keep your eyes open as you travel the course and only cross at the designated zones/times. Our athletes train very hard and should not be dodging parents on the course.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A SUCCESSFUL ATHLETE AND TO DEVELOP A STRONG TEAM?

COMMITMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Cross Country is a sport that takes quite a bit of time and dedication for students. Given our six day a week running schedule, coupled with their academic

obligations and all their other important commitments, many of them have limited free time. Therefore, understanding the importance of commitment and communications is the key.

Commitment means doing what is expected of you as a team member. Coming to practice every day is one of the most important commitments we expect. In fact, attendance is mandatory once school begins. We are trying to instill in our student athletes a sense of responsibility, consistency, and loyalty to their team. Achieving success in the classroom plays a huge part in this as well. Of course, without the grades, your son or daughter will not be able to compete as a Mustang and that hurts them and their team. We hope you as parents understand this and support our philosophy. While we are aware that unplanned family issues will occur, please keep in mind that we expect to see your daughter or son at practice every day, including all meets. We also expect they will let us know in advance if they will be required to miss a team practice or meet.

Communication means keeping their coaches and fellow teammates aware of anything that affects their potential performance on our team. If everyone does this, we will have fewer problems. If something comes up and your son or daughter must miss a practice, we expect them to tell their coach and not relay the information through a friend. If a problem comes up regarding a scheduled invitational or meet, let us know when you find out, not minutes before the event is to occur.

By demonstrating a commitment to the team and communicating, as needed, we will have a successful and drama free season.

CROSS COUNTRY VOCABULARY

League Preview Meet—a meet in the middle of the season with all our competitor schools in the Empire league.

League Finals Meet—a meet at the end of the season used to determine the Empire league final standings in all levels.

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 move 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 a race.

Pack—a group of runners in close proximity.

Personal Record—best-ever performance on a given course (PR)

Racing Flats—special, lightweight shoes designed for racing, rather than daily training.

Training Shoes—running shoes designed for longer wear in daily training.

Warm- Up—a running and stretching routine that gradually warms up the body for intense running.

Cool-Down—a jogging 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.

Speed Workout—a more intense training session intended to help adapt to the rigors associated with racing.

Special thanks to AAF/CIF Coaching Program Manual where some of the information contained within was sourced.