

Parent Guide to Austin Cross Country 2023

How the team works

Cross Country is a sport where no one sits on the bench. Every meet we go to throughout the season will have a race for your runner. If you sign up and go to practice, you are a team member and will run in the meet.

Generally, we have two coaches in charge of the high school runners and one coach in charge of the middle schoolers. Most practices are 7 - 12 practices. Many parents may wonder if an environment that includes such a large age range is appropriate for their 7th or 8th grader, our system seems to work very well for all. The program has a great history of older athletes being great mentors to the younger athletes.

The head coach oversees all runners, but more time will be spent with the varsity runners. These are the top runners on the team and they will all train together and may comprise as many as 12 to 15 runners. However, at a meet, the varsity team are only the top 7 runners, as determined by the coach. The selection of the varsity team for a meet is usually based on race times, not age or grade or length of time on the team. As a result, it is possible to go to a meet and see middle schoolers competing at the varsity level. The varsity lineup at a meet will change during the season, as performances change or injuries occur. Substitutes or alternates train at the highest levels to fill in where needed. Varsity runners will generally train at 40-60 miles per week, or more.

The rest of the team makes up the junior varsity and the head coach and assistant coach train them. These athletes are the next generation of runners who will take over in the future. Weekly mileage can vary, but is often in the ballpark of 25-45 miles per week. JV runners often alternate in and out with Varsity runners, depending on their times in meets. Many meets have three classes of races: Varsity, junior varsity, and Middle School or C races. All runners run in all meets. Varsity and junior varsity races are 5 kilometers or 5K. This is the equivalent of 3.1 miles. As mentioned, C races (or 7th and 8th grade races) are usually 1 mile or 2 miles.

Having said all this, you can see that the youngest runners don't often train with the oldest athletes because they are at different levels of development and mileage. However, it is common for all the team members to warm up together. They also ride the bus to and from meets together and attend team dinners and fundraising events together. These are fun times for the runners and really let them bond as a team.

Things you need to provide

Your runner should also have something to drink for proper hydration. This could mean bottled water, a reusable water bottle filled with water, or a sports drink like Gatorade or PowerAid. After hard workout we will provide Muscle Milk and other products to help the runners recover from the workout. Runners need to re-hydrate within 30 min of a workout.

Bare necessities:

Shoes, socks, shorts, T-shirt, water bottle, WATCH (not required but recommended) Other things that will come in handy throughout the season are:

Extra socks, extra T-shirt, long-sleeved T-shirt for cooler weather, knit cap
sweat shirt and sweat pants light, gloves/wool mittens wind/rain resistant running jacket, small to mid-size gym bag (with a name tag) to put everything in towel
nail clippers, Vaseline, and band-aids.

Cold weather and rain gear are needed as runners train and run races in all-weather unless there is lightning. This includes running through rain and even snow, if it comes to that! Most of the athletes wear a watch. This is a useful tool as it allows them to time their runs during practice. Most prefer a digital watch with large numerals. Also, it's good to find one with a stopwatch feature, an alarm feature (this allows them to count down a run backwards if they are trying to reach a particular goal), and some memory for splits. Splits are the times for a portion of a practice or race; for example, your son may want to track his time on the first and/or second mile of a race. FYI, a negative split is when he runs the second half of a race faster than the first.

Usually the younger athletes wear the same shoes for running a race as they do for practice, but at some point, in their running career they switch to spikes for races. Spikes are lightweight running shoes with metal spikes that protrude from the sole. The length of the spike can be changed depending on the type and condition of the running surface, but most popular are spikes that are 3/8 inch long. The coaches can give advice on when to wear a particular length of spike and will provide them. Racing shoes without spikes are called flats. Neither of these racing shoes provides the foot or leg with much support, so they are only for races, not practices.

Practice:

Before School starts:

Two weeks before the start of school (Aug 17,2023, official practices begin. These are mandatory for all team members and all registered team members must attend or let his coach know beforehand why he won't be there. Excuses such as "I'm tired" or "I'm sore" are not going to work. The younger team members get to know the older ones during this time as they all warm up together and have team meetings together.

The coaches have a training strategy for each runner based on ability, experience, development and attitude. The runners go on runs in groups based on similar mileage. For the first week of practice we will start at 8:00AM at the High School. Practice will last about 2 hours. For the varsity runners there is also an evening practice, this will be held at 7:15PM again at Wescott Field. This practice will last about 1 hour. For the second week of practice this year the coaches will be attending workshops so practice will be at 3:30 and the high school. Practice schedules can always be found at www.austinpackercctk.com

After school starts:

When school starts, regular practices begin after school Monday - Thursday. Again, these are all mandatory and coaches should be notified if your runner cannot make it. Practice begins at 3:47 and will end between 5:00 - 5:30. We will meet in the commons area between the two high school gyms. Middle schoolers will also be practice at the high school at 3:32, they will be assigned a bus at the start of the school year. Fridays practice will be at 6:30 for all high school runners. We will provide breakfast for the runners every Friday. We will also be practicing for two hours every Saturday once the school year starts. Information can also be retrieved from the website at www.austinpackercctk.com

The language of workouts

Distance (or over-distance) runs are steady paced runs at a pace where your son can talk. These runs are longer than the races. By the time your son is a sophomore or junior, he will be comfortably running ten miles or more continuously (a double digit run). The primary purpose of these runs is to gain endurance and to provide a day of recovery (yes, these runs are “easy” days). Intervals (or repeats) are workouts where after jogging a warm-up, the boys will run fast for one to six minutes and then jog recover for one to twelve minutes. A typical workout might be eight quarter- miles (comparable to once around the track) in about 90 seconds each with a three- minute rest between each fast run. This workout might be run in a park, a school playfield, on the Luce Line, etc. The primary purpose of these runs is to improve running efficiency, strength, and speed.

Threshold (or an A-T run or a Tempo run) runs begin with a couple miles of jogging and then have up to 25 minutes of very fast continuous running and then conclude with a couple of miles of jogging. Cruise Intervals, a modification of a Threshold workout, are at threshold pace (slower than regular intervals, but faster than distance pace) and follow the same pattern of Interval workouts. However, they are usually longer than intervals and have much shorter rests (recoveries) in between the runs. The primary purpose of these is to develop a tolerance to pain and efficiency at race pace.

Fat Coaches Run: These runs are usually two easy miles and strides (short 50 yard sprints). They are usually run the day before races and are quite popular with the athletes. These get the athletes fresh for meets.

Fartlek (a Swedish word that means “speed-play”) are runs that allow the runners to alternate speeds depending on their whim and condition.

Abdominal and Upper Body workouts are simply strength work for the runner’s core. They will be doing sit-ups, crunches, push-ups, dips, pull-ups, etc.

Base training is distance runs in pre-season or early-season to gain strength for the year. Cool-down is the jogging after practice and meets for relaxation and elimination of waste products from leg muscles.

Recovery running: Easy running the day after a workout or race. Stretching: Exercises to loosen up the body for running. Warm-up: Jogging and stretching to limber up for running.

Meets:

Cross country is the only sport where the parents need to be in shape to move around the course. If you want to see your athlete more than at the start and the finish you need to be prepared to move around during the meet. Once you arrive, you need to determine where the starting line is. Ask questions until you determine where the appropriate line is. If you see a coach or your runner, they will know where it is. You can also look around to see where the Austin camp is. The finish line is at the same spot for all races because it has a big timing clock next to it, and it doesn't get moved around. There is also a chute made of ropes or pennant flags just prior to the clock that the athletes run down to get to the finish line, so it's hard to miss.

At most meets, there are 3 types of races: Varsity, JV and Middle School races. (Who runs in which race is described in the section entitled "How the Team Works.") There is often a corresponding girls' race for each boys' race. The order of the races is not always the same from meet to meet. Checking the website will tell you when each race is scheduled. The race officials usually do a pretty good job of getting the races off at the stated time, but it's good to leave a little "flex time" in order to make sure you see your race.

You will be able to see your runner at the start of the race and the finish. There is usually a good spot somewhere else on the course to see the middle of the race and they often go past that spot twice. Just follow the crowd, as parents who have been there before will head in that direction. Sometimes these three spots (start, finish, and middle) are far apart and you have to hustle to get there and back to see as much of the race as possible. (That's why the parents are in such good shape. Of course, a fair number of them are runners themselves.)

Night Before The meet

There is usually a pasta party held for the athletes at one of the upperclassmen homes. A list will be sent out prior to the first scheduled pasta party letting the athletes know what they are to bring as well as the location on the party. Athletes are asked to supply, drinks, desserts, bread or drinks. The host family will provide the pasta. The parties start at around 6:00 and everyone is asked to be picked up by 7:30

Before the meet

So here's how to navigate a meet. Meets are usually held in parks, on golf courses or, occasionally, on the grounds of a high school. The schedule can be found on our web site www.austinpackercctk.com I will also include driving directions on the site.

The team is occasionally excused from school early the day of a meet. The coach ends a list of those who are competing that day to the appropriate school for an excused early dismissal

Plan ahead

The weather is usually hotter or colder than you're prepared for. If it's hot out, bring water, a hat and sunscreen for yourself. If it's cool or cold, wear a lot of layers. Always wear comfortable shoes that you know can stand up to grass, dirt and mud. Encourage your athlete to stay layered up and warm, so that their muscles don't tighten up before the race. When the weather is chilly, wear cold-weather clothing under their uniform, as well as hats and gloves. Tell them if they get too warm during the race, they can always take them off and throw them to a teammate on the side of the course.

What to do

You will get a glimpse as they run by. Cheer for him/her and for all the other Austin runners as they go by. You can cheer for the leaders, the stragglers and everyone in between if you wish--they all work so hard, everyone deserves all the cheering they can get! It's also good to cheer for the other Austin runners when they run. And don't forget to take lots of pictures of the runners--all the runners, not just yours - these pictures can be brought to the year-end banquet to give to the athletes.

Don't hover around at the camp. It's OK to let them know you've arrived by waving or saying hi, but they are trying to get ready for the race and needs some time to concentrate. At the end of the race, you should meet your runners and tell him that you loved watching them run and you are proud of the effort that he/she put forth. Runners like to hear that they did a great job, if they did please let them know it. They may look awful or even get sick to their stomach, but they will be all right in a few minutes. When they reach this point, they need to do a cool down run, so their muscles don't seize up.

After the race

You can stay for as much of the meet as you want. It is expected that all runners will stay through the entire meet and return to school as a group on the bus. If you need to take your runner home right after his event, you need to contact the AD and get her permission prior to the meet.

You should tell your runner that it is expected that they help clean up the camp and transport any equipment back to the bus in a cheerful manner. Same thing at set-up when they arrive. The coaches are busy with paperwork and the racing, and can use some help.

How team/runners score

Every time they run in a race, the performance is recorded and ranked. Many meets are large invitational meets and often the results can be found later that same day on www.wayataresults.com or www.raceberryjam.com as soon as the coach gets home and completes the results they will be placed on www.austinpackercctk.com The results are given out to the boys a day or two after the meet. The coach will discuss the results of these meets with the boys in a team meeting the next day. If you attend meet, you can get the time by either using your own stopwatch or watching closely at the finish line to see what time is on the large finish clock when he crosses the line. Lettering criteria are tied to how athletes place in meets, years of experience, and many other factors. It is complicated, but a detailed explanation can be found at the team's website: www.austinpackercctk.com

Team scoring

How is team scoring calculated for a meet? It's actually quite easy. The team with the lowest score wins. The score is derived by adding up the places of the first five runners from the team. Therefore, the lowest score attainable is if your team's runners finish in the first five spots (1st + 2nd + 3rd + 4th + 5th), which makes a score of 15. Your team's 6th and 7th runners can also contribute because they may "push back" the place of someone on an opposing team. For example, our 6th runner may beat another team's, 5th runner, thereby the other team would have a higher score

Team Events

Running can be a very solitary sport, and many people enjoy the contemplative nature of running alone. However, part of the fun of cross country comes from being on a team. Running together naturally makes it a group event. But there are also events for the team members that don't involve running.

Home meet pot luck

Following the first home meet to the season we will have a pot luck dinner at Todd Park. Parents are asked to bring a dish to pass. We will use this time to go over any information that parents might need leading up to the season and talk about our fundraising efforts for the season.

Team dinners/Carbos

One of the ways that the team gets together, and bonds is through team dinners. On nights before important meets, a potluck dinner is held at the home of one of the runners on the team. Parents sign up to prepare and deliver food to the host's house; some stay to help the host set up and clean up. Otherwise, it is an event for the runners and their coaches. The runners get some down time to get to know each other, catch up with each other and generally goof around. Sometimes the younger runners don't think they will fit in at these dinners, but that is not true. Many of the older runners started out when they were young, too, and will happily welcome younger runners. Sometimes the younger runners use these occasions to ask questions they have regarding cross country.

Alumni meet

The Alumni Meet is the official kick-off to the season. It's held on the Saturday morning after the first week of Coaches' practice at the Nature Center. All team members and coaches, both current and past, are invited, as are any family members who want to participate. There will be a team get together following the meet.

End-of-the-season banquet

The end-of-the-season banquet is the official end of the season. It is held usually in the middle of November. All the coaches, athletes and their families, and Athletic Office staff are invited. This is a fun evening, which celebrates the efforts of the runners and their coaches over the season. The runners are recognized with awards-both serious and funny.

Duluth Trip

We will once again be heading to the Swain Invitational meet this year. This will involve a overnight stay. This meet is for all high school runners as well as any runner has a top 14 time for the season. Hotel and meet information will be handed out about two weeks prior to the meet.

Injuries

"My (fill in the blank) hurts!

Sometimes injuries set in. When anyone begins running, either for the first time or after an extended lay-off, they will have sore leg muscles. This is normal and will go away after a few days. The third day is the worst; it should get better after that. Make sure they know to let the coaches and you know of his injuries or persistent aches.

What's normal?

Sometimes aches and pains develop. It's useful to consider the shoes. Even though they may be the proper fit for them, their stride may make them a 'hard heel-striker'. In this case, new insoles or inserts can offer more protection. If their knees, hips or ankles start to hurt, it is usually a good idea to start icing the area immediately-several times a day, for 10 minutes at a time. There are bags of ice available in the training area near the locker room, At home, it's useful to have a bag of frozen peas or corn in the freezer to use for icing. You can just throw it back in the freezer when finished.

Blisters are another common complaint. Fortunately, new technology in bandaging has brought out the Blister Pack. A box of these can be purchased at Target. Each 'pack' is cut to fit the blister with almost instant relief!

What isn't normal?

The bottom line is that each runner knows their own body and should seek treatment as they see fit, but if your runner experiences a sharp pain or the pain lasts for three or four days, they should see the Athletic Trainer. Your runner should not try to run through sharp or persistent pain, as this may only aggravate an unknown condition. There is a trainer at the high school and he is great at giving valuable advice. He will give your runner an initial diagnosis and perhaps prescribe some treatment or recommend that your runner see a doctor. If he recommends that they see a doctor, then your runner can only come back to practice with a release signed by a doctor. If your runner does have to stop running while they heal, they may do cross training to maintain aerobic conditioning. This could be riding an exercise bike or swimming, for example.

Reference:

Much of the information above was information I took from Bill Miles, former boys cross country coach for Wayzata. He has been an inspiration for many cross country and track coaches in Minnesota.

LETTERING POLICY