



**UNOFFICIAL
PARENTS' GUIDE
TO
BOYS' CROSS COUNTRY
RUNNING ©**

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I. Introduction

“What do you mean he runs three miles? ... All at once?!?”

When my son decided to run cross country in 7th grade, I had a few questions: How often will he practice? Will someone be watching him as he navigates the streets? How is it running with boys who are a lot older? And that was just the beginning. As time went on I seemed to have even more questions: Who runs in what race? What is a good race time? What should he be eating and drinking? What kind of shoes should he wear? Socks? Shorts? The list just kept on growing.

This unofficial parents' guide is designed to answer these kinds of questions and more. It also will let you and your athlete know what else is involved in the exciting world of cross country running, like pasta dinners, the year-end banquet, and the chute! We hope that the guide helps minimize those times when you thought, “I wish I had known about that!”

Cross country running has the potential to change your son's life . . . and possibly yours. As with most sports, it is demanding and requires a real commitment to many hours of hard work. You will find that because team practices and races consume so many hours, your son's training and racing will leave little extra time beyond what is needed for homework, eating and sleeping. This is not a bad thing because it means that your son must do a better job of managing his time, which usually results in less time for video games, TV, and web surfing. The discipline of balancing school activities and a team sport help develop time management skills that will last a lifetime.

Cross country is also character building. Through his running, your son will develop self-confidence and be less inclined to pay attention to peer pressure. Once he realizes that he has the personal perseverance to run 15-20 miles or more a week, what others think of him makes less difference. And once you realize that he can run 15-20 miles per week and race long distances at high speeds, you will also have a new respect for your son. And you may even be inspired to buy your own pair of running shoes!

II. How the Team Works

“When you run together, you’re brothers!”

This is a direct quote from a 7th grade runner when asked how he felt about hanging out with the older guys on the team at the team dinners or on the bus. Many parents may wonder if an environment which includes such a large age range is an appropriate one for their 7th or 8th grader, but the system seems to work well for all. The Edina program has a great history of the older guys being great mentors to the younger members.

Different coaches for different runners

Cross country running is a no-cut sport. If you sign up and go to practice, you are a team member. Lately, there have been about 75-80 boys on the team. In the recent past, there have been three coaches.

Often, one coach is in charge of the middle schoolers. They are considered to be the 7th and 8th graders. As Assistant Coach, he holds the future of the team in his hands. Because they get out of school earlier, the younger runners start their practices earlier, run shorter distances than the older guys, and finish earlier. They learn routes of different mileage around the Edina Community Center (ECC) from the coach and guys who have been on the team previously. They put together different “mile plans” based on what type of run the coach has set for the day and what their respective training level is. In general, the younger the boy, the less miles he runs per day. But by the end of the first year, most are running 3-4 miles per day. There are some meets for only 7th and 8th graders. Often the middle schoolers will form the basic team for the C race. Typically, this race is shorter (one to two miles, for example) and is designed for younger or newer racers.

The head coach is in charge of 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 boys. However, at a meet, the boys who officially make up 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. These boys generally train at 40-50 miles per week, or more.

The rest of the team makes up the junior varsity (this is generally runners in 9th through 12th grade), and they are trained by the third coach. He is only third in this narrative; he is Assistant Coach, and holds a very important position. He is training the next generation of runners who will take over in the future. Weekly mileage can vary, but is often in the ballpark of 25-35 miles per week. JV runners often alternate in and out with Varsity runners, depending on their times in meets.

Different races for different runners

Many meets have three classes of races: Varsity, junior varsity, and C races. All runners run in most meets. However, you have to qualify to run in conference, section and state meets. Varsity and junior varsity races for boys 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 guys don't often train with the oldest guys 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 guys and really lets them bond as a team.

Speaking from experience, if you have younger sons, this is the group of older guys you want your sons to hang out with. They are usually very good students. They are very encouraging because they know what it takes to start out and succeed in this sport. They are good role models and are often leaders in other groups, whether it is in school or outside school. A lot of these guys also have been on the team for a while, and know how it feels to be in the younger crowd, so the younger guys won't be excluded.

“We few, we happy few,
we band of brothers
For he who sheds his blood
with me today
Shall be my brother.”
--Shakespeare, *Henry V*

III. Running Gear

“I thought he just needed a good pair of shoes.”

Shoes

A good pair of running shoes is absolutely the most important thing your runner needs for gear. It's generally best to go to a store that specializes in running in order to get the personalized attention your son needs to get the right pair of shoes for him. Having the right running shoes is also key to injury prevention. They don't have to be the most expensive pair of shoes in the store; they just have to fit and feel right. There is no one “best” brand—every runner usually has a brand he swears by, but it is the best brand for *him*, not necessarily for your son.

A good pair of shoes will last 350-500 miles. It's a good idea to note when new shoes are purchased and track the mileage for each pair because worn out shoes can lead to injury. He should always pay attention for excessive wear and tear but a good first check is when the shoes hit 350 miles. If they still seem in good shape and are still comfortable, he can keep running in them but keep checking periodically after that. Get rid of them when they are uncomfortable, i.e., don't have much padding, or when they reach 500

miles . . . or when he outgrows them! Keep in mind that at 50 miles a week, he will need new shoes every ten weeks, at least.

Stores and locations

Here are the names and addresses of three excellent, local running stores:

Gear Running Store
4406 France Avenue South
Edina, MN 55410
952-926-2645
www.gearrunningstore.com

TC Running Store
6405 City West Parkway
Eden Prairie, MN
952-944-7386
www.tcrunningco.com/

Marathon Sports
2312 West 50th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55410
612-920-2606
www.marathonrunwalk.com

Things you need to provide: Water bottle and other gear

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 PowerAde. He needs to re-hydrate within the first 30 minutes after running, if possible.

When the boys first start practice in August, they wear T-shirts and shorts. As per the current style, most boys wear long (possibly mesh) athletic shorts. The older, more experienced runners choose to wear actual running shorts. These are short, very light and have both an inner layer and outer layer. Generally, the boys wear white cotton socks, often “no show.” Much has been written about the merits of “running socks” which are specifically designed to wick away perspiration, dry quickly and be lightweight. These are an option although they cost more than regular socks. Even Target carries their own brand of running socks.

Bare necessities:

- . shoes
- . socks
- . shorts
- . T-shirt
- . water bottle

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
- . towel
- . small to mid-size gym bag (with a name tag) to put everything in

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 boys wear a **watch** during practice. (It's best to leave the watch behind during a race.) 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 stop watch 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 guys 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 ¼ inch long. The coaches can give advice on when to wear a particular length of spike. 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.

What the school/team provides

When your son reports for coaches' practice at the Edina Community Center, he will be assigned a locker and issued a lock. He can store the above items in the locker. It's good to try and retrieve the most commonly used items for washing at least once a week. Some time during the first few weeks of practice, he will also be issued an Edina **singlet** (a sleeveless running shirt), shorts and a warm-up suit in Edina green and white. He will wear the official uniform to the meets and be responsible for returning them at the end of the season. Lost items will need to be paid for. The warm-ups are quite expensive, and it is not fun to lose them, because it isn't fun to pay for them.

IV. Training and Practices

“It's a training sport.”

Here's how it goes: It may sound simple but the more running you do, the better you get. That's the bottom line. It takes about 6 to 8 weeks to get into decent shape, so for many boys, the cross country season starts in June, right

“Somewhere in the world someone is training when you are not. When you race him, he will win.”
--Tom Fleming,
two-time runner-up at
the Boston Marathon
and two-time champion
New York City
Marathon

after school ends. If they have been doing Track, the first few weeks will be very low key with relatively low mileage, so that they can rest and recover. The rest of the summer builds an aerobic base of running. While the miles increase over time, are usually done at an easy pace, one at which a person could talk to a companion at the same time.

Summer running/Captains' Practice

At Edina, summer running can be done on one's own, or with other team members during Captains' practices. Going to Captains' Practice is highly recommended because a lot of guys like running with each other. Captains' practices are held six days a week (no practices are held on Sundays), generally in the morning. A schedule is issued each year at a team meeting soon after graduation and includes both start times and places. Generally, the younger team members do less summer running, but each runner's schedule is based on their own individual skills and goals for the following year.

Summer registration

During Captains' practices, but prior to the start of the official season, all athletes must register at the Edina High School Athletic Office. This must be done in person; parents cannot register for their sons. There are a variety of registration dates available for your convenience. Registration packets can be picked up in the Athletic Office or found on the EHS Athletic website. An up-to-date health physical needs to be on file. Information regarding registration and registration dates can be found on the EHS Athletic website (<http://www.edina.k12.mn.us/athletics>). There also is a fee, which helps cover the costs of bus transportation, meet officials, etc. Runners will not be allowed to attend Coaches' Practice unless they are registered officially with the EHS Athletic Office.

Coaches' practice

Three weeks before the start of school, official Coaches' 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 boy, based on his ability, experience, development and attitude. The boys go on runs in groups based on similar mileage, in the neighborhood surrounding the ECC. Some of the more experienced groups go as far as Lake Harriet or to Lake Cornelia for several loops around.

Regular practice

When school starts, regular practices begin after school every day and on Saturday mornings. Again, these are all mandatory and coaches should be notified if your son cannot make it. The boys at Valley View and EHS can catch an "activity" bus in the east parking lot of Valley View to get over to the ECC. This is a free service. It pays to be prompt because the bus driver never waits and the bus fills up quickly as it transports several different sports teams to the ECC. The boys need to get their own ride home after

practice. There is a phone available in the lobby of the main ECC gym and in the locker room for boys to call home for a ride. Older team members are very good about giving rides to younger team members, if necessary. So, "I don't have a ride to practice," will not work as an excuse, either.

The routine

Although every coach has his own method of training, it seems that every week of training during the season has a mix of hard and easy runs, a couple days of faster paced runs and one day featuring a long run, usually Saturday. Each has a purpose such as increasing strength, endurance, speed or aerobic capacity.

Your part

A big part of your job is to encourage your son --- when he is sore and tired, when he didn't get the time he wanted, when he got sick to his stomach at the end of a race (this is not uncommon), and / or when he is feeling overwhelmed by school and practice. Also, be sure to talk to your son about how training is going. And if something is not going well, explore it with him. Make sure you both understand how the season is going and what the coach expects of him.

The language of workouts (with thanks to Coach Bill Miles)

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 or at a school playground.

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 is to develop a tolerance to pain and efficiency at race pace.

Taper 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 boys**. These get the boys fresh for meets.

Fartlek (Swedish word for "speed-play") runs allow the runners to alternate speeds.

Training Definitions¹

Base training: The accumulation of distance runs in pre-season or early-season to gain strength for the year.

Cool-down: Jogging after practice and meets for relaxation and elimination of waste products from leg muscles.

Recovery run: 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.

Core exercises: Exercises that target the abdominal and low back areas.

¹ Marc Bloom, Parents' Guide to High School Track and Cross-Country (Marlboro, NJ: John Dye, 2003), 42.

V. How to Attend a Meet

“Cross Country: the only sport where the parents are in shape!”
~seen on the back of a T-shirt~

A cross country meet is something like a high-tech medieval fair. The athletes wear brightly colored clothing and often congregate under the same-colored tents, designating their school and team. Many are jogging around the grounds in groups, warming up for their races. Coaches are striding around the area with clipboards and timing devices. Parents are everywhere, milling around, trying to find the starting and finishing lines. And from all this chaos comes organization—athletes show up for their races at the appointed times and finish down to the tenth of a second. And at the State Meet, all runners now wear computer chips in their shoes for precise timing and identification.

“Fair, market, acrobats, fun and thieves.”

---Menander, Athenian comic playwright, describing the Olympic Games in 394 A.D.

Before the meet

So here’s how to navigate a meet. They are usually held in parks, on golf courses or, occasionally, on the grounds of a high school. Call the **EHS Athletic Hotline** (952-848-3814) the morning of the meet for race times and directions to the meet. Sometimes, based on changing road conditions, the directions can change later in the day, so it might be worth another call to check it out.

The boys are usually excused from school early the day of a meet. The coach sends a list of those who are competing that day to the appropriate school for an excused early dismissal. Those at Valley View and EHS will catch a bus in the east parking lot at the appointed time, which will take them over to the ECC where they change into their running gear. While they could leave their backpacks in their lockers, some boys take them along in order to do homework while they’re waiting. Sometimes the ECC has been locked up upon return to the ECC, so it may be prudent for your son to take his backpack, no matter what. Estimated arrival time back at the ECC is usually about ½ hour to ¾ hour after the conclusion of the meet and awards.

While the boys’ bus will travel before rush hour starts, most parents usually leave work or home just about the time traffic starts to get heavy. Leave plenty of time to get to the venue and find a parking place, or you may miss the race.

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 son to stay layered up and warm, so that his muscles don't tighten up before the race. Unless he's loose, he may not perform as well or he may incur an injury. When the weather is chilly, the boys can 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.

If you've signed up for taking bagels to the meet, make sure they get on the bus with the boys or you can take them to the meet yourself. You will want to be there fairly early with the snacks if you do the latter, as the first racers will be looking for them when their race is over. The boys should take care to minimize eating or drinking in the immediate hours before a race as it can lead to side stitches and vomiting. Experience is the only real guide and each boy will learn his own tolerance as he goes.

Scope out the site

Once you arrive, you need to determine where the starting line is for your son's race. The girls will have a different starting line from the boys in many cases, and the younger runners will often have a different starting line from the older runners. Ask questions until you determine where the appropriate line is. If you see your son, he may know where it is. You can also look around to see where the Edina camp is. The boys and girls usually have different campsites, but your best bet is to look for the green Edina tent. 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 three types of races: Varsity, junior varsity and C races. (Who runs in which race is described in the section entitled "How the Team Works.") There is a corresponding girls' race for each boys' race. The order of the races is not always the same from meet to meet, but calling the Athletic Hotline 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 son's race.

You will be able to see your son 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 fairly 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.)

What to do

You will get a glimpse of your son as he runs by. Cheer for him and for all the other Edina 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 Edina girl's team when they run. And don't forget to take lots of pictures of the runners--all the boys, not just your son--as these pictures can be brought to the year-end banquet to give to the boys.

Don't hover around your son at the camp. This will probably embarrass him. It's OK to let him know you've arrived by waving or saying hi, but he is trying to get ready for his race and needs some time to concentrate. At the end of the race, you should meet your son and tell him what a good job he did, whether he thinks so or not. Anyone who can finish a race has done a great job. He may look awful or even get sick to his stomach, but he will be all right in a few minutes. When he reaches this point, he needs to do **a cool-down run** so his 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 the boys will stay through the entire meet and return to the ECC as a group on the bus. If you need to take your son home right after his event, you download a permission form from the Athletic website the day before the meet, fill it out, leave a copy with the Athletic Office and give a copy to the head coach. It gets upsetting when a lot of boys are not there at the end of the meet, and the coaches have no idea what has happened to them.

You should tell your son that it is expected that the boys 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.

VI. How Teams and Runners Score at a Meet

“It's a numbers game.”

As they say, timing is everything...

Baseball isn't the only game known for all its statistics. Every time your son runs in a race, his performance is recorded and ranked. Many meets are large invitational meets and often the results can be found later that same day on www.raceberryjam.com. Smaller meets will not be posted on this site. They may be posted on the boys' cross country website, newly redesigned and updated by our own head coach, Jamie Kirkpatrick. Check out www.edinacrosscountry.com for this and other information. The coach will discuss the results of these meets with the boys in a team meeting the next day. If you attend a meet, you can get your son's 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.

All these times result in individual and team rankings—locally, regionally, statewide and nationally. There are also team records and school records. Based on lettering criteria set by the head coach, which he hands out at the beginning of each season, your son may earn a letter in cross country. **Lettering criteria** are not fixed from year to year because a change in coaches may cause a change in the criteria. Lettering typically includes achieving a certain time in a race, and attending a certain percentage of practices and meets, as well as any other items deemed important by the head coach.

What's a good race time

A good race time depends on a lot of factors: age of the athlete, physical maturity, genetics, race day weather conditions, training condition of the runner, mental attitude . . . even lunch that day. As a parent, you can check out what the top runners in each race category are achieving by looking at the results on www.raceberryjam.com. Naturally, if your son achieves an athletic letter, he will have pretty good race times. A big first goal is to break 20 minutes and any minute less in time after that is also a big achievement. The top runners in the State Meet generally run 5Ks in about 15 to 16 minutes and the Minnesota State Record for a cross country 5K is just over 14 minutes! The runners who go on to be recruited by big Division I cross country teams are running sub-15 minute 5Ks.

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 causing the other team to have a higher score.

The runners are guided toward the finish line by the **chute**. The chute is a barrier separating the runners from the crowd. It can be some kind of fencing or simply string attached to stakes, but it functions to narrow down the stream of runners so that they come in one at a time. Officials make sure that the boys go down the chute in the order in which they finished. Then an official gives each runner a piece of paper with his place number marked on it, or the boys rip off the bottom of the number they are issued for the race (and which is pinned to their singlet) and turn it in. The bottom line is that everyone is timed, given a number, and scored. Even the very last person from all the teams is timed which gives each participant a chance to get their own **PR**.

What teams and runners are at each meet? It depends.

Edina generally competes in invitational meets. They feature 10-15 teams from the area. Sometimes only a certain number of top runners go to these. There are also 7th and 8th

grade meets for the younger team members. Toward the end of the season, there are grade-level championships where boys compete only against others in the same grade.

The 12 fastest team members race in the varsity race at the conference championship meet. The rest of the team has the opportunity to race in the JV race. The top 7 runners (plus two alternates) run at the section championship meet. At the section meet, if the team finishes in the top two positions, then the whole varsity team goes to the State Meet. Otherwise, only those on our team finishing in the top ten go to the State Meet.

The true definition of success

In summary, there may be more than 200 runners in a JV race or a middle school race. Only one of these boys will win the race and receive a little piece of paper with a “1” on it, and possibly a ribbon or a medal. The true definition of success in running often has nothing to do with ribbons or medals. Every runner can feel good about a race. If your son has done his best in a particular race, has given it all he has, then—even if his time isn’t as good as a previous race—he has succeeded. This sport is so demanding that only a rare few even choose to participate. Boys who make the personal commitment to run six days a week are to be commended, no matter what their race times are. In addition, personal records (or **PRs**) are set each time your son beats his previous personal best time. These are the most important records of all!

“In running, it doesn’t matter whether you come in first, in the middle of the pack, or last. You can say, “I have finished.” There is a lot of satisfaction in that.”

--Fred Lebow,
past president of New
York City Road Runners

VII. Team Events

“There is no ‘I’ in team.”

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.

Team dinners

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 boys 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 boys and their coaches. The guys get some down time to get to know each other, catch up with each other and generally goof around. They come in and eat, watch some TV, maybe play basketball or Frisbee and then go—all in just about an hour or so.

Sometimes the younger guys don't think they will fit in at these dinners, but that is not true. Many of the older guys started out when they were young, too, and will happily welcome younger team members. Sometimes the younger boys use these occasions to ask questions they have regarding cross country.

There may be one or two team dinners with the girls' cross country team. These are held at a venue larger than an athlete's house.

Movie nights

Movie nights are a joint get-together with the girls' cross country runners. A parent will offer his/her house for a large group of guys and girls to watch a movie and have some snacks. Some years have a movie night and some do not.

Car wash fundraiser

The **car wash fundraiser** started a few years ago and has been a big success. This takes place on the first Saturday after the start of the school year. All the boys participate by selling tickets and washing cars for a three-hour shift. While the team can request monies from the Edina Athletic Booster Board, it also can raise some funds for specific items that the team needs or wants. Several years ago, money was requested and provided from the Booster Board for heart monitors for the team, and three years ago, the team car wash funds bought a brand-new tent for the team.

Alumni meet

The **Alumni Meet** is the unofficial kick-off to the season. It's usually held on a Saturday morning in mid-August at Pamela Park. All team members and coaches, both current and past, are invited, as are any family members who want to participate. Liquid refreshments and bagels are donated and provided free to participants and spectators alike. The girls' cross country team also has attended the alumni meet in the last several years which makes it an even larger event!

End-of-the-season banquet

The **end-of-the-season banquet** is the official end of the season. It is usually held the day after the State Meet, on Sunday evening. This is either at the end of October or the beginning of November. All the coaches, athletes and their families, and Athletic Office staff are invited. This is a really fun evening, which celebrates the efforts of the boys and their coaches over the season. The boys are recognized with awards—both serious and funny. There is also a recap of the season and announcements of team captains for the following year.

VIII. How Parents Can Participate

“What can I do? I’m not a runner.”

Attend mandatory parent/athlete meeting prior to season

Cross country running is definitely a participatory sport and you don’t even have to be a runner to participate! But first things first: there is a mandatory parent/athlete/coaches meeting held at EHS immediately after the Fall All-School Pep Fest. This is usually the 3rd Wednesday of August...consult the Athletic Office or website. This meeting is a chance for parents and athletes to meet and hear from the coaches and captains. Very important information, schedules and packets are given out at this time. This is also the time for parents to sign up to volunteer their time and support for the team.

Snacks, Dinners, Fundraising

You can donate bagels for the meets, you can host a team dinner, you can volunteer to prepare food for the team dinners, or help out the host. You can help with fundraising or organizing the team banquet—there are committees for both of these. The best part is that you get to meet a great group of guys and their families when you get involved---and it’s a fun group!

Attend meets and take photographs

Going to the meets is a great way to participate. The boys really appreciate the support, both for themselves and for the rest of the team. If you go to the meets, be sure to take lots of photos. Then you can donate the photos for distribution to the boys at the team banquet.

Check with your runner

Ask your son for information. There are often handouts with schedules, results, awards, rules and rosters, not to mention order forms for official team photos and T-shirts. Initial information is handed out at the Mandatory Meeting in August. As much information as possible will be e-mailed, so be sure to submit your e-mail address to the team captains or their parents.

You can also participate by making sure that your son is physically prepared. Make sure he is getting enough rest, especially a good night’s sleep. Two other key areas are nutrition and injuries. These each deserve their own section.

IX. Nutrition

“I’m giving up pop.”

Your teenage son may already seem like an eating machine, but eating takes on a whole new meaning when he starts to run. Good nutrition during training keeps young athletes’ bodies healthy and speeds up repairs when stresses and strains happen. Proper food at the proper time fuels exercise and prevents *bonking*, the “mutiny on the body” that occurs when a runner’s body starts to stall mid-race.

Problem is, there is no one eating regimen, nutrition program, or energy bar that will guarantee success. In fact, if you get a group of runners, physiologists and nutritionists in the same room, you’ll have a virtual food fight over training and nutrition for runners. Some marathon runners have an eating program of such complexity that it would make a normal person tired just thinking about it.

Ultimately, the best advice for high school runners is just what you’ve been telling them since they were little—eat healthy foods, three well-balanced meals a day, and cut out the pop and junk food. Beyond the tried and true eating adages, here are a few tips for fueling peak performance:

Calories: Lots of the right kind

Sedentary teenage boys need to eat 2800 calories per day². To that, your son should add 600 calories per hour of running. Many runners are thin. Part of this is self-selection. Heavier boys don’t like to run because it’s hard to carry all that extra weight around. A rule of thumb for weight for runners is 2 pounds per inch of height. Some boys won’t even make this weight because they are growing so fast during these high-growth years.

Naturally your son should eat three meals a day. Breakfast is very important and can be a whole-grain cereal with fruit and low-fat milk. Orange juice is also a good idea. If your son has an early morning practice, sometimes a glass of OJ is all he can manage to get down and still have a good run. Then he can eat his nutritious breakfast when he returns.

Try to avoid purchasing school lunches. Much has been written about how high in fat and salt they are with lots of empty calories. A bag lunch with high-quality ingredients is a much better alternative. Protein is especially important as a component.

Dinner may often include pasta—runners really crave the carbs and their bodies need them for fuel. Don’t forget the protein and vegetables. Milk and water are important hydrators. Snacks should be low fat and can have carbs. Fatty snacks like chips or doughnuts are going to make it hard to run the next day. A late night bowl of cereal is often a good choice. It’s best not to eat anything less than three hours before racing or

² Bloom, 14.

practicing. Eating too close to running can lead to side stitches, a painful but not serious condition.

Protein is important

Most runners don't get enough protein, yet they need protein to replace amino acids burned during exercise and to repair muscles. As noted in *Running Times* magazine, endurance athletes need 0.55 to 0.75 grams of protein per pound of body weight, and teenage boys who compete may need as much a 0.8 to 0.9 grams of protein per pound.³ This means your runner should have some protein at every meal. Snacks should also contain protein. Some boys have a fruit smoothie or an ice cream malt everyday with protein powder added. Others drink a can of Ensure or a bottle of a commercially-made, yogurt-based fruit smoothie. A daily multi-vitamin can also be an asset.

In summary, a healthy, well-balanced diet featuring as few pre-made, processed foods as possible is optimum--and an important part of his training. Remember, look for nutrient-dense foods and avoid foods with empty calories. *Runner's World* suggests having these 15 foods on hand to keep him in the best possible shape and running at top form:

- 1) Almonds
- 2) Eggs
- 3) Sweet potatoes
- 4) Whole-grain cereal with protein
- 5) Oranges
- 6) Canned black beans
- 7) Mixed salad greens
- 8) Salmon
- 9) Whole-grain bread
- 10) Frozen stir-fry vegetables
- 11) Whole-grain pasta
- 12) Chicken
- 13) Frozen mixed berries
- 14) Dark chocolate
- 15) Low-fat yogurt

“You might be a cross country runner if...you haven't had a pop in six months.”
--old cross country joke

For a complete explanation of the benefits and use of these 15 foods, please check out: http://www.runnersworld.com/article/0,7120,s6-242-301--10200-0,00.html?cm_re=HP--Most%20Popular--The%20Best%20Grocery%20List

Keeping these ingredients in the house will make sure that he--and your whole family--will easily be able to eat the proper type of meals, day in and day out. Check out recipes on Runnersworld.com, Epicurious.com, and FoodTV.com for great alternatives using these ingredients. There is also nutritional advice on active.com.

³ Suzanne Girard Eberle, “Protein Power: Finding the Right Balance in Your Diet,” *Running Times*, May 2004, 36.

Drink Up

Proper hydration is as important as proper intake of solid food. Water is the medium through which the body carries oxygen and nutrients to the cells and waste products away. It also plays a central role in regulating body temperature.

“Dehydration is every athlete’s Achilles’ Heel,” says Chris Carmichael, who is Lance Armstrong’s trainer and an advisor to Olympic athletes around the world, (*Food for Fitness*, p. 169) He recommends that athletes consume *a full gallon* of fluids each day. This could be Gatorade, Powerade, milk, or water. Rather than slugging down huge amounts at once, he suggests taking a few gulps of water every 10 to 15 minutes, especially during exercise. Obviously, drinking enough fluids is particularly important in warm or hot weather.

Often runners drink only water in social situations where others may be drinking pop. It pays to have a lot of bottled water on hand!

Eating and Drinking for Recovery

Immediately after a particularly hard workout or a race, there is small window of opportunity in which the body can replace its glycogen stores, according to long-time coach Bill Miles. Athletes who replace lost fluids and carbohydrates within the first 30 to 60 minutes after exercising recover more quickly than those who wait⁴. If this opportunity is lost, the body will not be ready to restore this glycogen until 24 hours later and the next day’s training will suffer. The body benefits from 50 to 100 g of carbohydrates, 10 to 25 g of protein, and 24 to 32 ounces of fluid. (A PowerBar and a Gatorade, or a bagel with peanut butter and a Gatorade provide 50 g of carbs and 10 g of protein). This should be followed up with a good meal within two and a half hours.

Join In

Finally, parents are young athletes’ best role models, so think before you eat. You’ll help your runner train better and maybe improve your own fitness.

For more information on running and nutrition, see:

<http://www.theharrier.com/marcbloomrunning/trn/45bestfoods.php>

Chris Carmichael, *Food for Fitness*, G.P, Putnam’s Sons.

Suzanne Girard Eberle, *Endurance Sports Nutrition*, Human Kinetics.

Amby Burfoot, *Runner’s World Complete Book of Running*, Rodale, Inc.

Nancy Clark, *Nancy Clark’s Sports Nutrition Guidebook*, Third Edition, Human Kinetics, 2007

⁴ Girard Eberle, 36.

X. Injuries

“My (fill in the blank) hurts!”

Sometimes injuries set in. When a boy begins running, either for the first time or after an extended lay-off, he 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 he knows 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 him, his stride may make him a ‘hard heel-striker’. In this case, new insoles or inserts can offer more protection. If his knees, hips or ankles start to hurt, it 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 the ECC, as well as a tub of iced water (ice bath) where the athletes can soak their sore legs. At home, it’s useful to have a bag of frozen peas or corn in the freezer to use for icing. Your son can just throw it back in the freezer when he’s finished. It’s not unusual for athletes to take ibuprofen for the usual aches and pains.

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 boy knows his own body and should seek treatment as he sees fit, but if your son experiences a sharp pain or the pain lasts for three or four days, he definitely should see the EHS Athletic Trainer. Your son should not try to run through sharp or persistent pain, as this may only aggravate an unknown condition. There are trainers in the locker room at the ECC and they are great and a valuable asset. They will give your son an initial diagnosis and perhaps prescribe some treatment or recommend that your son see a doctor. If they recommend that he see a doctor, then your son can only come back to practice with a release signed by a doctor. If your son does have to stop running while he heals, he may do cross training to maintain his aerobic conditioning. This could be riding an exercise bike or swimming, for example.

Injury nomenclature

Here are some terms describing injuries that you may commonly hear, but not be truly familiar with:

shin splint: Overused muscle or inflammation of connective tissue on shins. It can be caused by poor conditioning or running on surfaces that are too hard.

Plantar fasciitis: Inflamed tissue at the point where the fascia connects to the heel bone. Ice, rest, strengthening and stretching are the keys to curing plantar fasciitis.

Achilles tendonitis: an inflammation of the Achilles tendon, or tiny microscopic tears in the tissue. The Achilles tendon connects the calf muscle to the heel bone. When it is stretched, it becomes swollen, painful and less flexible than normal. If not treated properly, it can become a chronic problem. Initially, rest, icing and possibly an anti-inflammatory such as Advil may be advised by the trainer.

stress fracture: this is an internal bone injury that can be found in either the upper or lower leg. Small breakage or cracking of the bones occur, most commonly in the metatarsals or tibia. It is serious and needs at least 6 weeks of rest. See a professional.

Osgood-Schlatter Disease: a common cause of sore knees, especially in adolescent boys who are very athletic. It is caused by the pull of the quadriceps (thigh muscles) on the patellar tendon (just under the kneecap) where it attaches to the shinbone. This is a self-limiting condition which will remedy itself over time in most cases. It's worth getting it checked out by an orthopedic specialist to make sure there is no resulting bone damage.

Iliotibial Band Syndrome: The iliotibial band is a tendon-like portion of a muscle called the tensor fasciae latae, running down the outside of the thigh, from the hip to the knee. When inflamed, overused or tightened, it can cause pain either in the outside of the hip or the knee. The knee pain is a common condition called **runner's knee**. The best method of recovery is to do exercises which strengthen the surrounding muscles.

side stitch: this is a muscle spasm under the ribs. It's very painful but is not a true injury, and you can run through it. It's best avoided by not eating within three hours of running and staying hydrated .
HINT: If the runner experiences a stitch during a race, according to *Men's Health* magazine, he should, "continue running, but slow down. Contract abs and rib muscles, then take a deep breath in and out through pursed lips. Repeat."

XI. The Science Behind the Running

Learning Specialist Cathy Liebman says:

Here's what we know: running is one of the most efficient forms of aerobic exercise. It strengthens the heart, boosts the lungs, and increases blood circulation. Advances in neuroscience offer yet another reason to stay fit. Simply stated, exercise, which most definitely includes running, improves brain function. Athletes are not only exercising their muscles; they are also exercising their brains.

Recent discoveries in neuroscience have shown that exercise assists in blood flow to the brain, nerve cell growth and stronger neural connections, which ultimately help to improve our memory. Biological changes brought on by physical activity enhance a person's capacity to sharpen memory and increase the capacity to master new information.

Exercise actually produces chemical alterations which in turn make for a stronger, healthier and happier brain. Strenuous exercise, which most definitely includes running, raises levels of endorphins known for creating enhanced feelings of comfort and well-being. During vigorous exercise various brain regions show an increase in the neurotransmitters (chemical messengers between the neurons) serotonin and dopamine. Serotonin helps with regulating moods and anxiety, as well as our ability to manage stress, depression and aggression. Dopamine is associated with motivation, focus, and sustained concentration.

Clearly, breaking a sweat is essential to give us the mental balance and focus critical for enhancing brain power and ultimately academic function. A body in balance can only help the frontal lobe as it is developing in the teenage brain. The frontal lobe is responsible for, among other things, judgment and reasoning. A mind in balance is better equipped to respond rationally. The academic and social demands our kids are facing today can be daunting. Any edge they can get, especially one such as running, that benefits both physical and emotional health should be integrated into their daily lives.

XII. What's Next? Winter Running

OK. Your son likes running, he has been doing it a couple of years and wants to get to the next level. The coach will probably recommend that he does “winter running.” This is exactly what it sounds like: running outside, six days a week, all winter long. The coach will provide him with a week-by-week mileage schedule of how many miles he should do everyday. This will keep him in shape to do Track in the Spring which is the next logical step to improve and maintain fitness as a distance runner. Amazingly enough, summer running then follows the Track season; same concept, not as many layers of clothing.

An excellent substitute for winter running, which many endurance athletes prefer, is cross country skiing or Nordic skiing. If he does ice hockey or basketball as a winter sport, he will maintain his physical prowess and won't necessarily have to do winter running.

Gear

Winter running is part of the drill for many runners and can be accomplished with the proper cold-weather gear. Go to one of the local running specialty stores and they will be able to recommend what you will need. It will probably include the following:

- A running jacket which is wind- and rain-proof
- A thermal type of long-sleeved shirt which is fairly tight to the body
- A looser long-sleeved shirt which can be layered over the undergarment but is under the jacket
- Winter running tights
- Winter running pants to be layered over the tights
- Lightweight sweat-wicking knit gloves
- Mitten-like glove covers which are layered over the knit gloves
- Neck gaiter
- Knit cap
- Socks which wick away perspiration, and moisture from any icy puddles
- Winter running shoes

Several running shoe manufacturers make specific winter running shoes. They are water and cold resistant because they have a mylar inner lining which keeps the cold, wind and moisture out. They also have thicker treads on the bottom of the shoe. These shoes are heavier than normal training shoes but no one is running for speed outside in the winter anyway.

Although the treads are thicker and cut deeper than normal, they will not prevent slippage on ice. You can purchase spike-like items that fit over the shoes; one popular brand is Yaktrax. Some seasoned runners recommend using a system of pebbles and glue. Yes, you can buy carborundum pebbles and an extra-strong adhesive in a kit. You apply the adhesive to the bottom of the shoes and press the pebbles into it with a stick which is part of the kit. It takes 48 hours for the glue to set up properly, so you have to plan ahead. The pebbles and glue are usually good for about a month of running and then should be reapplied. Needless to say, these shoes are no good to walk around in inside the house.

The whole winter running gear system involves a program of layering and de-layering, depending on the temperature. The colder the weather, the more layers.

Where to run

Every coach will want his runners to run on the roads no matter what the weather because it approximates cross country running better, but when the temperature gets down around

zero and the daylight ends about 4:30 in the afternoon, sometimes it is good to have some indoor running options.

There are four treadmills in the training rooms for EHS athletes.

Private health clubs have indoor tracks and treadmills.

Edinborough Park: Edinborough Park is located at 7700 York Ave. S.

Indoor track: 1/16th of a mile

\$4.50 per visit for Edina residents; can purchase a 10 visit punch pass for \$40.

Track

Monday-Thursday	6 a.m.-9 p.m.
Friday	6 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday	9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sunday	9 a.m.-9 p.m.

http://www.ci.edina.mn.us/content/facilities/edinborough_park/fitness_center/index.htm

Bloomington Activity Centers Jefferson and Kennedy High schools have indoor tracks that are open to the public. The tracks are above the gyms.

Indoor track: 1/7th of a mile

\$7 per visit fee for non-residents; multi-month passes are available. A non-resident student can get a six-month, track-only pass for \$65.

http://www.bloomington.k12.mn.us/departments/facilities/activity_centers/index.html

The Lindbergh Center

The center is located on the campus of Hopkins High School, 2400 Lindbergh Drive in Minnetonka.

Indoor track: 1/6th of a mile

A non-resident student can purchase an annual membership for \$60.

<http://www.lindbergh-center.com/>

Metrodome Dome Running

Starting Tuesday, November 21 thru mid March 8 (except Thanksgiving). The MDRA turns the Metrodome into the place to be twice a week. When the weather gets ugly and you prefer a nice warm dry run inside, Dome Running is the ticket. Dome Running is each Tuesday and Thursday from 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. each night. The cost is \$1. Enter at Gate D. You can park free in the upper Dome lot. If you have questions contact Rick Recker 612 375-0805.

XIII. Recommended Reading

[Once a Runner](#) by [John L. Jr. Parker](#).

[God on the Starting Line: The Triumph of a Catholic School Running Team and Its Jewish Coach](#) by [Marc Bloom](#)

[Running with The Buffaloes: A Season Inside with Mark Wetmore, Adam Goucher, and the University of Colorado Men's Cross-Country Team](#) by [Chris Lear](#)

[The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It](#) by [Neal Bascomb](#)

[Pre : The Story of America's Greatest Running Legend, Steve Prefontaine](#) by [Tom Jordan](#)

[Run with the Champions : Training Programs and Secrets of America's 50 Greatest Runners](#) by [Marc Bloom](#)

[Daniels' Running Formula](#) by [Jack, Ph.D. Daniels](#)

[Running to the Top](#) by [Arthur Lydiard](#)

[Harriers: The Making of a Championship Team](#) by Joseph Shivers and Paul Shivers

XIV. Helpful and Interesting Websites

<http://www.edinacrosscountry.com/> **Our own website**, designed and updated by Head Coach, Jamie Kirkpatrick

<http://www.edina.k12.mn.us/athletics> Home of Edina High School Athletics

<http://www.raceberryjam.com/> Local race results, rankings and more

<http://www.dyestat.com/> Home of High School Track and Cross Country

<http://www.runmdra.org/> Minnesota Distance Running Association

<http://www.mshsl.org/mshsl> Minnesota State High School League

<http://www.marathonrunwalk.com/> Local running store

<http://www.gearrunningstore.com/> Local running store

<http://www.tcrunningco.com/> Local running store

<http://www.teamusaminnesota.org/> Information on Minnesota runners at national and world levels

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

<http://www.mensracing.com/news.html>

<http://www.stevepre.com/> Steve Prefontaine

<http://www.runningtimes.com/> Monthly running magazine

<http://www.runnersworld.com/> Monthly running magazine

<http://www.downthebackstretch.blogspot.com/> A summary of Running and Track & Field from Minnesota

<http://runningminnesota.blogspot.com/> Interviews with top local runners

<http://www.flocasts.com> Coverage of elite runners, meets, and coaches including interviews, race footage and photos

XV. Suggestions / Additions

This unofficial guide has been put together with the help of parents of cross country runners, both past and present. It is a work in progress. We hope that it helps ease the transition of both you and your son to a great middle/high school experience and we welcome any suggestions or additions for future revisions. We look for ways to make it more complete, more accurate, and more fun!

Thanks to those whose questions, conversations and comments have added immeasurably to the topics included in this handbook.

In particular, I would like to thank my editors, Nancy Jurkovich, Terri Smith, Sue Lyke, and my husband, Ralph--all parents of cross country and/or track captains--for their generosity of time and spirit in putting this guide together. Many thanks to Terri Smith for "beefing up" the nutrition information and Cathy Liebman for writing about the "fit brain."

Laurie Zickert

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Pediatric Sports Therapy. Osgood Schlatter Disease: Effective Solutions For the Most Common Cause of Teenage Knee Pain. Newbury Park, CA.

Will-Weber, Mark, ed. The Quotable Runner: Great Moments of Wisdom, Inspiration, Wrongheadedness, and Humor. Halcottsville, NY: Breakaway Books, 2001.

"We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing,
while others judge us by what we have already done."
--Longfellow

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