



# SHCA Cross Country Program

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The SHCA cross country program aims to improve the running abilities of the student athletes and to promote an environment of sportsmanship and teamwork. Cross country is a sport that challenges athletes to discover their unique abilities and teaches them the importance of hard work and perseverance.

The cross country program runs from early August to late October. There are three levels: Developmental, Junior Varsity, and Varsity. All three levels practice together, typically three times per week, including meets. We hold practices at different local trails, and locations are alternated so runners can prepare for a particular meet or terrain.

Meets are hosted by other Catholic schools in the south hills and are held after school. We take part in the South Hills Invitational in late September and in the Diocesan Championship at the end of the season. We also have opportunities to take part in other invitationals hosted by other public and private middle school and high schools. The race lengths range from 1.6 to 1.8 miles. Most meets are divided into junior varsity (3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade) and varsity (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade). Some schools offer a developmental race for 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade runners and the course is shortened to 1.2 to 1.4 miles.

The cross country team must have the following to take part in the program:

1. A volunteer **Head Coach** with the proper clearances to coordinate practices and run the team at meets. The Head Coach is appointed by the Athletic Director and approved by the school principal.
2. At least one volunteer **Assistant Coach** with the proper clearances to help with practices and meets and to take control of the team in the absence of the Head Coach. The Head Coach may propose Assistant Coaches, which the Athletic Director approves.
3. A volunteer **Team Parent** to coordinate any activities for the team throughout the season. This includes scheduling the required volunteers to serve at meets.

## Progression of Skills

Below is the progression of skills that coaches will aid athletes in mastering during their time competing in cross country at SHCA.

### Developmental - Grades 3 - 4

The focus of the Developmental cross country program is on introducing students to the sport. Coaches will emphasize:

- Proper running form
- Proper technique for dynamic stretches and plyometrics
- Endurance for longer races
- Introduction to a variety of running surfaces
- Introduction to proper form and strategy for varied elevations
- Developing an understanding of one's own running talents and abilities
- Importance of listening to coaches, respecting and encouraging teammates, and conducting oneself with good sportsmanship



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## Junior Varsity – Grades 5 -6

The intermediate level builds on prior skills and works to develop an understanding of cross country as a team sport. Coaches will emphasize:

- Continued improvement in running form
- Continued improvement in technique for dynamic stretches and plyometrics
- Endurance and strategy for longer races
- Continued practice on and development of strategies for a variety of running surfaces
- Continued development of proper form and strategy for varied elevations
- Continued development of individual running abilities
- Introduction of pace groups to foster individual time improvement and to develop understanding of team performance and likelihood of scoring points as a team
- The importance of encouraging other runners to improve individual performances for the success of the whole team
- The importance of setting individual goals to improve performances at each race and throughout the season
- The importance of listening to coaches, respecting teammates, and conducting oneself with good sportsmanship
- The importance of acting as a role model for younger athletes

## Varsity Grades 7-8

The final level builds on prior skills and prepares students for the rigors of a high school cross country program. Coaches will emphasize:

- Continued improvement in running form
- Continued improvement in technique for dynamic stretches and plyometrics
- Endurance and strategy for longer races
- Continued practice on and development of strategies for a variety of running surfaces
- Continued development of proper form and strategy for varied elevations
- Continued development of individual running abilities
- Introduction of pace groups to foster individual time improvement and to develop understanding of team performance and likelihood of scoring points as a team
- The importance of encouraging other runners to improve individual performances for the success of the whole team
- The importance of setting individual goals to improve performances at each race and throughout the season
- The importance of listening to coaches, respecting teammates, and conducting oneself with good sportsmanship
- The importance of acting as a role model for younger athletes
- Team leadership skills
- Value of running in building speed and endurance to improve performance in other sports



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## Coaching Approach

The cross country program encompasses many age levels and abilities. The coaches will work together to ensure that the athletes are performing to the best of their ability, learning how to be part of a team, and developing a love of the sport. To carry out these goals:

- The Head Coach will handle the overall team management. All runners can take part in all meets. Some invitationals have age or time requirements, and the head coach, with input from the assistant coaches, will make all decisions on team entries. When formulating teams, the Head Coach will consider athlete abilities, the likelihood of scoring in the relevant tiers, effort at practice, and the meet rules. In some instances, athletes are asked to run in a higher division to improve the overall team results.
- The Head Coach will also keep a record of personal records (PRs) and conduct a debriefing after each meet to highlight successes and motivate the athletes.
- The Head Coach, with the aid of and input from the assistant coaches, will develop various training plans to improve running performance, including hill workouts, speed training, tempo, and long runs.
- All coaches will encourage runners to work hard at each practice, to recognize their individual strengths, push beyond their limitations, and recognize that cross country is not a sport of instant gratification but rather a progression of skills over the course of the season and over the years of participation.
- All coaches should teach students to conduct themselves with good sportsmanship, respect teammates, and listen to the coaches.
- Coaches should cultivate a positive atmosphere. Athletes should enjoy and take pride in being part of the team. The goal is to develop a love of the sport.