

Cross Country: A Parents Guide

Welcome! Your son or daughter has chosen to join the Thomas Middle School Cross Country Team. Here is a comprehensive guide to what occurs during cross country practices and meets.

What is Cross Country?

Cross Country is a competitive team sport offered in early fall for students in grades 6-8. It is the only sport 6th graders are allowed to compete in at Thomas. That is why we have so many on the team! We hope they enjoy the hard work, develop confidence, have fun, and make some friends. Plus you can do it the rest of your life. It also improves one's mental, physical, and social health.

It takes time to develop an aerobic base, so we train in the summer. The season ends with the state meet on October 14, although for many kids their last meet will be on 10/28 at the Fred Martin Invite. Only 7 boys and 7 girls get to run in sectionals.

How Long Are the Races? Grades 6 and 7 run 1.5 miles while 8th graders run a 2.0 mile course. Some of the better sixth/seventh graders might run up with the 8th graders, but 8th graders cannot run down with the younger kids. At sectionals and state, the distance is 2 miles, and the top 7 runners plus alternates are on this team. They can be from any grade. There is a boys team and a girls team.

Meets generally have 4 races: 6th/7th grade girls, 6th/7th grade boys, 8th grade girls, and 8th grade boys. One meet has a one-mile race for 6th graders.

Athletes do a warm up before their race, which they start when the race before theirs starts. So, 6/7 girls warm up right away, and the 6/7 boys start when the 6/7 girls race starts. After their race, athletes should do a cool down and stretch. Please don't take them home right after they run. It would be great if everyone stayed for the last race, which is the 8th grade boys race. It develops camaraderie.

Where and When Do We Meet for Practices?

Students should change, sign in, and be ready to go by 3:00 pm on school days. We meet out back on the field. All athletes should bring a water bottle with them. On hot days, a 16-oz. water bottle is not enough. We meet right after school and finish by 4:30.

What is the uniform?

The uniform is a green singlet that is ordered and the athlete keeps. It is ten dollars. These can also be worn for track and field competition and for next year in cross country. We wear them with plain black shorts. Most kids like wearing their own shorts, but we can also issue black shorts, which will be returned at the end of the season.

All kids should have newer running shoes. You can get them from a running store such as Runners High and Tri in AH. The most expensive pair of shoes I own are running shoes! Spikes can also be worn at meets like in track and field. Cross country spikes are $\frac{3}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{2}$ ", or $\frac{5}{8}$ " long. Some meets don't allow them, such as the Flight Meet. Spikes, however, are not required.

What About Transportation?

A bus takes all kids to and from meets. Parents may take their own child home. Practice ends at 4:30 on school days, and there is no activity bus to transport them home after this; they will need a ride.

There are two busses to take kids to meets. Athletes should change into their uniforms immediately after dismissal, go outside to Belmont Street, check in with a coach, and get on a bus.. Coaches will check them in as they get on the bus. Water bottles should be brought with them as well as their backpacks. They will not be able to reenter the building upon returning to Thomas.

How Does Scoring Work?

Teams consist of five or more runners who all race together at the same time with other teams. The finish line is the wide part of the chute, not the narrow part. Passing other runners should occur before entering the chute. The top five finishers from each team are scored and their finishing places are added up for the team score. The lowest score wins – first place gets one point, second place gets two points, and so on.

Finishers 6 and 7 are called "pushers" since they can push the scores of the other teams down two places - if they finish ahead of them. All other runners are "invisible" in the scoring. But that doesn't mean they aren't important. Some of the best leaders are not the top scorers. And remember, hard work can beat talent when talent doesn't work hard!

Every runner's goal should be making their best effort daily, focusing on improvement. The top 7 scorers can change from meet to meet. The lineup is not set in stone. All athletes who give an honest effort day in and day out, with good attendance, will improve over time – barring injury and illness; it's inevitable.

Where Do We Run?

We practice at Thomas. We run some workouts on the grass fields around and near the school, or we run routes in neighborhoods around the school. Home meets and some practices are at Hasbrook Park. On occasion, Lake Arlington is a nice change of pace. Running in the same place gets boring.

Courses at meets are mostly run across grassy fields, wooded paths, and occasional hard surfaces. Some are flat, and some have hills. That is why it's inaccurate to compare your time from one course to the next; every course is

different. Plus, sometimes a course is not exactly 1.5 or 2.0 miles. You CAN, however, compare your times on a course to your previous time on that same course.

The Coaches

Both coaches have an athletic background. Coach Slowinski has coached soccer and golf at the high school level and also played golf at DePauw University. He is in his second year of coaching cross country. He has been at Thomas for 6 years and is currently teaching eighth grade language arts.

Coach Moore has coached track and field at Hersey for 25 years and is in her 4th year coaching cross country at Thomas. She started running cross country in Columbus, Ohio in 5th grade, ran track and field for her school, which would continue into the summer with the Buckeye Track Club. She teaches health at Hersey.

How Can I Help My Athlete?

Recovery is an important part of athletics, and this includes rest, rehydration, and nutrition. Adolescents need 9-11 hours of sleep since they are growing. Help them stay organized, so they can work towards this goal. Check out the John Underwood links on our website about sleep and diet. They are great resources.

Recovery after running includes a cool down, rehydration, and eating carbs with a little protein after the cool down. Sometimes they don't feel like eating - drinking chocolate milk is a great recovery fluid. Eating lots of fruits and vegetables is good for the immune system as well. Please try not to skip these steps. Before leaving a meet, ask them if they've done a cool down (5-10 minute slow jog) and stretched.

Being positive towards their effort is important. Parents are a big influence on their kids, even though sometimes it doesn't seem like it! Cross country is hard, especially at first. Developing runners have to get used to the discomfort and develop discipline. I once heard from a 6th grade girl: "I hate running, and I'm only here because my friend is." As 7th grader: "I don't hate running as much." As an 8th grader: "I actually like running and I want to set a record in track and field." And in 9th grade: She was on our state-qualifying 4 X 800 relay. Hard work really does pay off!

Parents can also help by working at the home meets! You don't need any experience. You can stand by a flag and make sure the kids go in the right direction (go left around the red flags and right around the yellow flags); pass out cards at the finish line; keep the kids walking through the finish chute, rearranging them if needed; record names at the table; bring ice in a cooler or fruit for the finish; and, most importantly, tell your child how much you love watching them run!