

Cross Country

How a Meet is Scored

Scoring a CC meet is a bit like scoring a golf event - low score wins. While there are several different racing and scoring formats that meets can take during regular season invitationals, we'll first review the traditional scoring method that would be used at the Conference, Sectionals and WIAA State Meets.

A Varsity team will enter their top 8 runners in the Varsity race. The standard distance for girls is 4 K or 2.5 miles and for boys 5k or 3.1 miles. If there are 10 teams entered, there would be as many as 80 runners all starting and competing the Varsity course at the same time. JV Meets are scored the same way, but there is usually an unlimited amount of entries, so the size of the race can sometimes be twice that of the Varsity race.

Most races have each runner wear a computer chip on their shoe during the race so that places and times are immediately recorded at the completion of a race. The old-school method was to record the time of each finisher and to hand out cards at the finish line. The cards would be turned back in to match names and teams with the times to tabulate results.

While it could be any of the 8 runners your team entered in the race, the most important finishers are the first 5. **A team's finish in the standings is based on the Total of the Individual Places of their top 5 runners.** A team must have 5 finishers to have a valid score. So a perfect score in Cross Country (otherwise known as "slamming a meet") is 15 (1+2+3+4+5). This, of course, is extremely rare. Especially since most competitions are now Invitationals where there are anywhere from 6-20 schools competing. In a 20-school event (like the Rebel Invite at UW-Parkside), keeping your score under 100 could easily place your team in the Top 3 Scores.

While not factoring into the score of their OWN team, the 6th, 7th and 8th runners on the team can indirectly affect a score and can often still determine the outcome of a meet. For a deep team (like ours), **the 6th, 7th and 8th runners can serve as "pushers"**.

See the sample Dual Meet below. Through 4 runners, the Spartans were losing 17 to 19. But since our "pushers" snuck in the finishing chute ahead of the opposing 5th scorer, they "pushed" the other "5-man" to 12th and our total wound up being 1 better than theirs after all 5 were scored. WE WIN!!

	<u>Spartans</u>	<u>"Them"</u>
1	1	2
2	4	3
3	6	5
4	8	7
5	9	12
Total	28	29
6	10	13
7	11	14
8	15	16

In addition to being a possible “pusher”, the 6th-place finisher of any tying teams will break the tie. Ties are relatively common. Particularly in smaller meets like Conference, where there may only be 7 or 8 competing schools.

Why Pack Running is Vital to Success

You'll often hear coaches and fans talking at a meet about how a team's “pack” is forming or moving. There are several reasons why teams run in packs.

1. It can be downright **intimidating to other teams** when they see all of the same color jerseys near them. Their opponents can view a pack's bond and togetherness as an insurmountable wall that's awfully hard to get past.
2. It is psychologically **FAR easier to run your own best race WITH** a teammate than it is to do it on your own. The feeling of getting dragged along by the power of the pack is powerful and real. Drawing from that energy and not wanting to let teammates down is what pack running is all about. It's a LOT easier to have a personal letdown if flying solo out on the course.
3. Keeping a Pack **together and near the front** of the race **will win meets**. A “Pack of Pity” that is consoling and waiting for each other while drifting back in the race is obviously counter-productive. But one that pushes and moves together puts a lot of mathematical pressure on other teams.

A team with the two best CC runners in the world might finish 1-2-15-30-43 (Total = 91). Their weaker links drifted back, finished alone, and probably gave away valuable points down the home stretch. Our Spartans could beat this team and the best two runners in the world by “packing” our scoring near the front: 12-15-16-18-23 (Total = 84). CC is a TEAM SPORT where you cannot have success without a whole unit functioning as one.

Alternate Scoring Methods

One common variation to standard scoring is that some meets add the **Total Time** in minutes and seconds of the 5 Scorers. This isn't much different...but it can swing the scoring in the favor of the team that has a superstar. An individual beating the rest of the field by 1:00 can have a BIG affect on the Total Time of her team relative to that of everyone else's #1 runner. While in a traditional scoring format, her advantage over the next few finishers (even though they finished WAY behind her) is only a point or two.

A few Invitationals will alter the race categories. Rather than Varsity and JV, some races (like our own Jamie Block) **run by classes**. We run a Frosh/Soph race and then a Junior/Senior race. The top 5 times from either race are still added up to form the “Varsity Score”. It's felt that for the first Invite of the year, it's nice for the athletes and coaches not to have to declare who their Varsity and JV are and to just let kids compete against others their same age.

The Laser Invite in Waukesha (we don't currently go to) adds another twist. They have all #1 and #2 runners run a race, then #3 / #4s, then #5 / #6s, then #7 / #8s. This gives kids who normally run mid-pack and score 5th for their team the chance to run up front and possibly win a race against everyone else's #5s.

No matter how you score it, Cross Country can be a very exciting sport to watch if you can spot how teams are approaching a meet and score it in your head while watching it play out. Have fun out there!