



## Drills and Techniques to Develop Cross Country Athletes in Practices and Meets



*To help our CYO Cross Country coaches have ideas for practices and meets, we gathered the following survey responses from our Cross Country coaches. Feel free to grab any of these ideas and utilize them with your team moving forward.*

### **What are some specific ways (activities/drills) you maximize player development in practice, to help each athlete grow through their participation?**

- We have a track that's 9 laps to a mile. We give runners popsicle sticks for the amount of laps they need to run which is equal to the length of their race. They drop the sticks in a bucket as they finish each lap. It helps them keep track of their laps, as well as prep them for the length of their race and how to pace themselves.
- We always start and end practice with a stretching circle to promote flexibility and muscle health.
- We do butt kick, high knee and stride out drills, as well as review good running form to prevent cramping and practice a relaxed running form to help with endurance.
- Faith, fun, friendship and fundamentals is what we stress in our program. Each member of the team makes a contribution to the whole team's success at each and every practice and meet.
- Fun games, student lead stretches and circuits
- Do a rotation of intervals, stairs and relays with a cross country type half mile loop.
- I try to make practice fun. We don't do the course very much. Although we sometimes do intervals on parts of the course, we mostly do fun runs.
- We have the athletes run at a jog, a run and a sprint. Some runners think running is only about the sprint.
- We work on hills and distance for endurance, relays for speed work, and dynamic drills.
- Everyone stretches together and once a week the entire team does the same work out. Everyone runs a slow steady state run in an area where the little kids can catch up and run with the big kids. We then do relays that have all ages on each team. On other days we break into grade level groups and we always cheer on the other groups throughout the work out when we see them.
- Running hills, two classes at a time, with the older class joining the younger class' line for the second time through and vice versa.
- Flexibility exercises, such as running backwards and skipping.

- XC practices for us are pre-k through 5 (only K-5 run Meets) so we mix up what happens in practices often. The 4th and 5th graders have more traditional endurance runs while the pre-k through 3rd participate in rotations that include relays, hurdles, tag games, strength and stretch, pacing games, starts, obstacle courses, endurance weave course, mock meet etc.. It helps to be a P.E. teacher with lots of activities planned out.
- Lots of running games...activities that have them running but make them think they are doing something easy.
- For our X-country practice, we did a longer (0.6 mile) loop group run, at individual pace, followed by speed work on a flat football field.
- Setting a goal to run a target distance without stopping. This is a major accomplishment and encouragement to our newer runners. For younger runners relay races offer some accomplishment.
- We play a game called "rabbit" with the k-3rd grade athletes, this game is played where the runners are chasing a group that starts ahead of them. We do between 6-8 300m intervals.
- Focus on each child's individual strengths, encourage the kids to encourage each other as team members, and make it fun! eg running games ( K age group) like caterpillar chase, red light: green light, relays, freeze tag, jaguar sprints, the little engine that could etc.

**3. What are some specific ways (strategies/techniques) you maximize player development *during meets*, to help each athlete grow through their participation?**

- I try to have a one on one chat with each runner before races to set a goal for them- run the whole time, sprint at the bottom of the finish hill, sprint when you get to the orange fencing, improve your time by 30 secs, etc...
- When possible, I get runners to the start, then sprint to the woods before the hill to cheer them at that point. It's a good point for runners to be able to see/hear their coach.
- The keeping and recording times accurately is the best way to help a runner understand their own personal development. Placement is only a gauge on how one runner compares to all other runners of the same grade/gender for a specific race. When you can minimize placement and emphasis time then you allow the runner to understand that their time is their own personal accomplishment that we can all be proud and respectful of their achievement. With measuring accurate times of a runner then personal satisfaction of their participation is developed as they can measure for themselves their own personal improvements or how various factors both personal (eating too soon before a race or lack of sleep) and environmental (wind, rain or heat) can positively or negatively influence an outcome.
- For the youngest runners, it is all about keeping it fun and making connections about caring for their own personal well being. How running and being fit connects to other interests.

- Encourage, ask if they had fun, acknowledge and thank them for representing and supporting their parish and or school. Acknowledge their sacrifices made for the team.
- I just tell them to do their best and try to improve. Frankly, I really don't care about winning. I'm more impressed with the kids that aren't great athletes, who find out that they are pretty good runners, who work hard, improve, and become more confident people. I've watched a couple of my kids from past years (who I initially didn't think of as runners) continue running and become top competitors at the high school level and receive college scholarships. That's been the real reward of coaching cross country for me.
- Before each meet we set personal goals, whether it be place position, time, running the whole distance vs having to walk some, etc.
- We all warm up together and each grade level does a simple cheer at the starting line.
- Give them advice on the starting line, such as 'don't go out too fast at the start'.
- With K-3 have fun, enjoy, run safe, listen. 4th and 5th we prep during practice about setting personal goals, pacing to finish strong. Overall, enjoy running and being part of a team.
- Encourage them to have fun, do their best and for older ones focus on setting a new realistic goal.
- I provide a motivational speech reminding the athletes to challenge themselves and that it is always about doing their best. I also make it a point to check in with each athlete individually, ask how are they feeling, are they ready etc. I find that this is helpful in letting them know that you are always there for them.
- Encouragement, praise for individual effort and doing their best, developing a school spirit that enables them to see they are each important members of the team.
- Celebrating their success ( ie crossing the finish line regardless of place) both verbally and by medal award ceremony at final meet and cupcake party this week. Presenting them with a photo of themselves running in the meet.