

Cross Country

Dekalb Coaches Cross Country Clinic

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Eagle's Landing High School



This will be my 29th year in education. 20 years at Eagle's Landing HS

Athletic Director 2008 - 2014

Head Cross Country and Track & Field Coach 2004 - 2017

I started running XC in the 1970s in Europe.



Today's presentation:

- 1) Building a cross country program
- 2) Training
- 3) Strength training



Eagle's Landing Cross Country

- I started in 2004 (the program was semi established)
- 18 region championships
- Individual state champion and several runner-ups.
- ?? Podiums and top 10 finishes
- Last podium in 2016
- I stopped coaching Cross Country in 2017.
- In 2018 only 2 girls ran at region.
- By 2021 there was no boy's team
- In 2022 Coach Hall took over, 20 boys and girls ran at region.
- The numbers continue to grow (despite overall athletic participation declining in all sports at ELHS)



Building a XC Program

Barriers to building a program

Cross Country is hard

It takes time and patience to be good

Cross country scares a lot of high school students



Overcoming this

Appreciate the athletes who are out. Be sure to let them know this often

Make it fun - snacks, games, awards, etc.

Convince them that If they can make it through a season, they will be different people

Students who come out for cross country are often looking for a place to belong - help them find it in XC!

Building a XC Program

Barriers to building a program

Current GHSA post season format - Sectionals

Two sectionals per classification

Only the top 12 per sectional make it to state

24 total teams make it to state

In other sports, 32 teams make it to the state playoffs.

How do you overcome this? Schedule a couple of big meets per season.



Building a XC Program

Barriers to building a program

Cross Country/distance running will make you slower

Of course this is untrue.

Find examples where this is not true - I've had other coaches call me in the middle of their practice.

Show the athlete/parent/guardian how your training PLAN will make them faster, not slower (more on that plan later)

Social media gurus.....



Educate yourself on your competition.

Building a XC Program

Barriers to building a program

Not enough athletes to go around, you may have to share

- You may have to do this.
- Work with the athlete to do what is best for THEM.
- Involve your AD
- Don't be the coach that gives the athlete an ultimatum

Related to this...

XC as training for other sports - at least they are out, make them want to stay out and bring friends a little more on this shortly) and, they are guaranteed playing time in XC.

Building a XC Program

What you as the coach can do to bring them out and keep them out

Cross country AS training for track or other sports revisited

- Remember - you are trying to build your program
- Emphasize the importance of cross country as more than training
 - Competing is competing, regardless of the sport
 - If you can compete in cross country, your other sport becomes easier
 - As a xc athlete, they will get faster and be better prepared, use this as part of a larger conversation about moving up in distance in track
- Encourage these athletes to bring their friends out. Athletes are your best recruiters

Building a XC Program

Barriers to building a program

Summer/Club track, trainers, etc

- You will have to find a way to work with them.
- Set a team policy. Get that policy approved by your AD and have it signed by the athlete and parent/guardians.
- Meet with the athlete and their parent/guardian before the season.
- Communicate, especially if the team policy is not being met.

Building a XC Program

What you as the coach can do to bring them out and keep them out

Be positive, your energy rubs off on your athletes -

Celebrate them for showing up. Many of these athletes are looking for a place to belong.

Appreciate them for coming out.

Consistency - practice every day (if you don't think it is important to practice, how do you expect your athletes to think practice is important)

Communication is so important

Embrace cross country and what it can do for the athlete. Your enthusiasm will be felt by the athletes.

Building a XC Program

What you as the coach can do to bring them out and keep them out

Promote the program (**and yourself**)

Athletes bring out other athletes

Find that athlete that IS the example for others

Communication - over communicate, with athletes and with parents.

- Post the schedule
- Team fees - clear what they are for (supportive parents/guardians help keep the athletes on the team)
- Weekly team meetings - celebrations, the upcoming week, training for the week

Building a XC Program

What you as the coach can do to bring them out and keep them out

Developing a cross country schedule

- Know your team
- Weekday meets can be good
- Lower level invitationals
- High level invitationals
- How often should your team race? New runners - more racing, veteran runners - less racing



Building a XC Program

Team organization

Team leaders make your job easier (a good team leader/captain is NOT always the fastest)

Team meals

Information, information and more information

Communication

Post race results

Keep charts to show improvement - postseason meetings

Social Media -Celebrate!!! And Celebrate some more



Building a XC Program

Final thoughts before moving on to strength training

- Building a program takes time
- Consistency is a key
- Avoid canceling practices
- Use heat/lightning days as teaching days. Take them into the classroom.
- Run in a light to moderate rain. Races are run in the rain.

I felt like it was important for my teams to act like the best. Emulate what the top teams were doing.

Strength Training

- For xc, use mostly body weight exercises
- Hit each area twice a week (Tuesday/Thursday)
- For efficiency combine strength training and other workouts (keep the hard days hard and easy days easy)
- Do legs twice a week and on opposite days do core and upper body. Doing core and upper body on easy days is fine
- We focused a lot on this in the summer and between XC and track
- Do not run less so that your athletes can strength train

Can you really develop foot speed while
running XC?



What is “speed” for a distance runner?

- Speed that you can use when you need it in a race, but also more speed over other distances.
- If you can run 400m faster you can run an 800m, 1600m, 3200m and 5K faster
- **At some point most championship races become a sprint!**

Use this part of training to “sell” your program

My 4 x 4 teams ran sub 3:20 with XC athletes many times.



Upper Body

Much of this can be done at the end of practice

- Dips
- Pull-ups
- Pushups
- We do 3 sets of each times 10-14 reps of each
- Core - all your typical core exercises
- Building strength to carry you during runs and races



Lower Body

I designed this so you do not have to go to the weight room

- Bench Step ups
- Bench Squats
- Lunges
 - All are body weight
 - Do them at the end of your hard days (Tuesdays and Thursdays)

- Bench Step ups

3 sets of 10-14 reps each



Bench Squats

3 sets of 10-14 reps



Lunges

Forward Lunges
High Knee Lunges
Side Lunges

Some do these continuous -
50m, 100m or more. They
will do 1, 2 or 3 sets.
others do them in sets by
time - 3 sets of 30 to 90
seconds.



Incorporating Strength training into practice

- Do strength training after they have run as a part of practice. Do legs on workout days. Core on two other days.
- Do a core exercise, roll over, pushups, core exercise, pushups, etc.
- Stretch after strength training



Cross Country Training

Some general thoughts on training

- Encourage your athletes to run 5-6 days a week.
- Start small, run/walk/run
- Consistency is key. Avoid taking weeks off once they start. Consistency leads to volume which leads to success. Training year round leads to even more success. Speed and fitness increases as mileage/minute increase

Cross Country Training

Some general thoughts on training

- Use minutes run, not miles.
- Train, don't strain....this is hard for a lot of coaches
- Don't fall for gimmicks. There are no shortcuts.
- For newer runners and developing teams, keep intensity low. Fewer workouts is better for these individuals/teams
- **Group your athletes in training groups based on 5k PR and fitness.**

Cross Country Training

My philosophy on training

RUN. RUN OFTEN. MOSTLY EASY. SOME
MODERATE. A LITTLE HARD

Eric Heintz

- Each athlete has a “running” age.
- Create that plan from the start of the season until the end of the season. Write it out.
- Beginning runners can run 5 days a week, more advanced up to 6 days a week

Cross Country Training

Some terminology

- Aerobic - easy to moderate running, this is where cross country runners should spend most of their time.
- Tempo - harder running but not sprinting (run fast but not hard)
- Strides - 40 to 100m repeats, often on grass or turf, run at 1 mile pace
- Fartlek - run easy for X amount of time, run faster for X amount of time and back to easy running.
 - 2 minutes easy, 30 seconds fast, 2 minutes easy, 30 seconds fast, continue for the length of the run. Break, repeat.

Cross Country Training

Some terminology

- Drills for cross country - A skips, B skips, “Zombie Walks”
- Other warm-up movements - leg swings, lower leg hops, IT stretch.
- 200m repeats - used for sharpening/peaking
- Hills - 200 to 300m long, run up easy, jog down

Cross Country Training

My philosophy on training

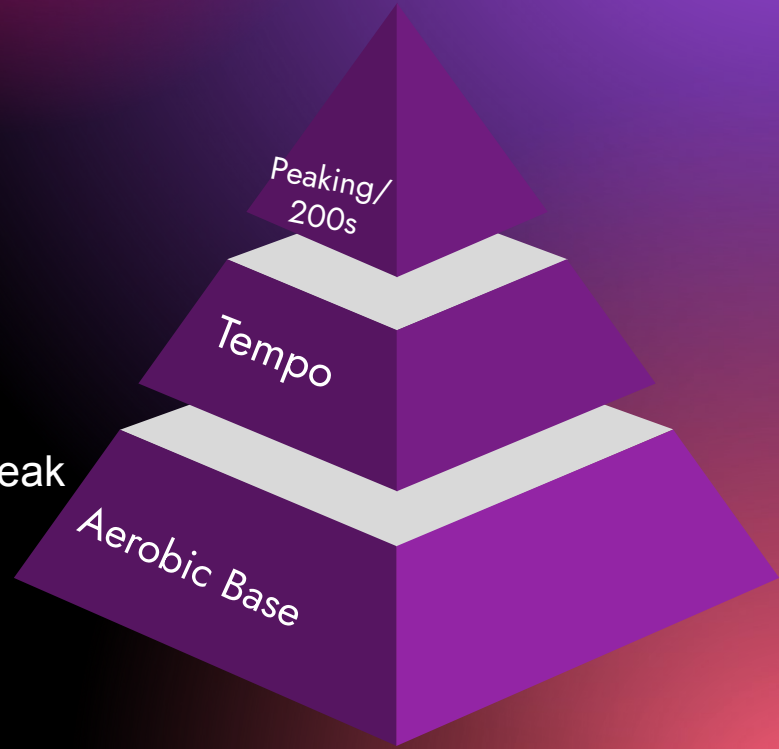
I was more worried about running too fast too soon.

Think of training as a pyramid.

Patience is important.

An athlete who is aerobically fit will get faster

As temps cool and you start adding 200s, they will peak



Hill Workouts

- Normally hills are 30-90 seconds long. 200 - 400m long. Run the uphill, recover jog the downhill. Hills can be grass or asphalt
- Run the hill at about 75% effort (athletes should still be able to talk in sentences without gasping for air)
- Do 6 to 18 hill repeats depending on the level of the runner and time of the season.
- Hilly Blasts - short (10 second bursts up the hill) Normally later in the season. No more than 6 per workout
- Focus on perfect form
- Hills are speedwork in disguise

Strides

- Do these 3+ times per week
- Done after our slower runs
- Do them at 800m to 1600m pace emphasizing good form
- Start at 6 X 50m in summer and go to 6 X 80m later in the season
- Full rest between strides
- If it is a good grass surface, they can do them barefoot

Once or twice a week, use falling starts

Falling starts



Sometimes, do these instead of normal strides

Cross Country Training

Tempo running

What is tempo running?????

The simplest definition, it is a comfortably hard effort but it is still aerobic.

The handout I made is very basic but it works.

Three sample tempo workouts that go with the pace chart

#1 - 6 X 400 at the appropriate tempo pace with 1 minute rest between each rep

#2 - 4 X 800 at the appropriate tempo pace with 90 seconds rest between each rep

#3 - 3 X 1600 at the appropriate tempo pace with 2-3 minutes rest between each rep.

Adjust these as your athletes progress. Shorter reps for the less advanced athletes, longer reps for the more advanced athletes.

Cross Country Training

Sample Week

Monday - warmup, aerobic run, strides, stretch (normally the longest run of the week)

Tuesday - warmup, aerobic run/Tempo/hills, strength training, stretching

Wed - warmup, aerobic run, strides, stretch (normally the lightest day of the week)

Thursday - warmup, aerobic run/Tempo/hills, strength training, stretch

Friday - aerobic run, strides, stretch (if there is a meet Saturday, this is another lighter day)

Saturday - meet/aerobic run or off

Sunday - off or long run (for runners who are getting in shape or more advanced runners)

Cross Country Training

Sample Practice

- Quick discussion of the day's practice plan
- 5 - 10 minute warm up run.
- Leg swings, one legged hops (each 3 sets of 10) and IT stretches.
- Dynamic drills
- Runners stretch what they want, get water....
- The run/workout
- Strides/Strength training
- Stretch
- Final words/break it down

I liked to post the entire practice on a wall or clipboard.

Cross Country Training

IT Stretch



These are part of the warmup and help prevent injuries of the iliotibial band. Hold for 10 seconds on each leg. Switch back and forth 3 times.

Cross Country Training

Sample Season Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thursda y	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1	AR/Stride s	AR/Streng th	AR/Stride s	AR/Streng th	AR/Stride s	off	off
Week 2	AR/Stride s	AR/Streng th	AR/Stride s	AR/Streng th	AR/Stride s	off	off
Week 3	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Strength (meet?)	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off
Week 4	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Strength (meet ?)	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off

Cross Country Training

Sample Season Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thursda y	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 5	AR/Stride s	Tempo/Str ength (meet ?)	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off
Week 6	AR/Stride s	Tempo/Str ength (meet ?)	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off
Week 7	AR/Stride s	Tempo/Str ength (meet ?)	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off 
Week 8	AR/Stride s	Tempo/Str ength	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off

Cross Country Training

Sample Season Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thursda y	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 9	AR/Stride s	AR/200s/li ght strength	AR/Stride s	AR/Fartlek /Hills/ Strength	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off
Week 10	AR/Stride s	AR/200s/li ght strength	AR/Stride s	AR/200s	AR/Stride s	Meet Day/off	off
Week 11	AR/Stride s	Easy run/stride s	Easy run/Strid es	Easy run/200s - only 3 or 4	Easy run/Strid es	Sectional s	off

Cross Country Training

More advanced workouts

Continuous temp running

- 20, 30 or more minutes at a faster pace with no breaks.

Progressive tempo run

- 10 minutes at one pace, 5 minutes at a faster pace, 2 minutes at a faster pace

Multiple paces during the same workout

Doubles

- Running twice in one day. Typically, the early run is an easy 20 - 40 minutes. The second run is a longer run or workout.

Cross Country Training

The Little Things

I often used the end of practice or lightning/heat days to talk about this

Sleep - one of the most underrated aspects of training.

Nutrition - they must eat and hydrate. There is a lot of literature on this but the athletes must eat a variety of foods (not just carbs or sweets.) Educate vs lecture though. They must also hydrate, a lot.

Eating the night before and the morning of a race

Shoes - they must wear distance training shoes for practice.

- Fleet Feet

- Big Peach

- Highland Runners

- Phidippides

Encourage them to get some XC racing spikes.

Cross Country Training

Final Thoughts

Record everything. How much each athlete runs each day/week, etc. Times in workouts, races and so on.

Summer running - it is too late this year, but have an organized summer program

Running safety

If you see Woodland - Stockbridge, Eagle's Landing HS or Stockbridge at a meet, talk to their coaches. Their programs are building.

Wrap up

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