

United North Central Warriors

Cross Country Handbook 2026

Why Cross Country?

Why do you compete? Why do you race 3.1 miles? That's gotta hurt. You race for the challenge... the danger... the rush of putting yourself in a place where you must do your absolute best because the race requires it. To give your best is to honor your fellow competitors... your teammates... your coach... your family... and your community. To give your best in a race is a matter of honor... and duty... and you know that going in. You know, also, that the different courses will challenge you... that your competitors will challenge you... and that you will challenge yourself. You know, too, that there will come a critical moment in every race where you must make the decision to lay it on the line... to take your shot... or to fall back and regroup. Do not fear that moment. You hope you'll be up to the challenge, but you're never entirely sure... and it's that uncertainty that calls to you... because it is there, at that moment, that moment of decision, that you offer yourself up to be measured: by the clock... by your legs and lungs... by your guts, and by your heart. Your teammates will be there for you.

I want you to recognize yourself, through Cross Country, as someone who is learning to take responsibility for your life... someone who is learning to control your own destiny. "I want you to know that the lessons you learn as a Cross Country runner will stay with you your whole life... that as a result of being a Cross Country runner you will gain the habits of a winner: setting goals... working hard... doing your best... being patient, persistent and focused. You may not know it yet, and certainly don't understand it, but if you choose it, Cross Country will never leave you. It will lead you down avenues of achievement and success that you cannot yet imagine."

Philosophy

A sport like cross country is a unique team sport. Each individual on the team runs their own race and can score and advance to state individually but also, if everyone pushes to do their best, advance the whole team as well. The team goal is for you to help your team score as few points as possible(this is a good thing). As we all know, it is much easier to compete at your highest level with a team of people around you pushing you to be greater than you can push yourself. Running will push you to your physical and mental limits. This makes being positive very important. There will be no negative comments allowed. Challenge your team mates through encouragement. As coaches

we will design workouts to make you better, both physically and mentally. Older athletes need to be the driving force that gets everyone to reach their potential. This may be by pulling some of the younger runners with them or pushing some of them from behind. Either way, the experienced athletes will help determine the success of all the other athletes at reaching their goals. Please, bring the best, most positive outlook you can on running! Think of the leaders of the past, all presented with positive attitudes and awesome work ethics and their spirit needs to live on in the workouts and races we do this year. Our goal should be to run a better race than YOU did in your last race; feel better than the race before; push harder (physically and mentally) than you did the race before and you will leave the race feeling like you've won! The beauty of this sport is you get to compete as a team while trying to improve your own goal each and every week. Finally, our coaching philosophy includes the fact that Cross Country should be FUN. We strive to make practices and meets enjoyable experiences that will both develop skills and provide positive lifelong memories for every athlete.

Sore vs. Injured

Throughout the course of the season you will feel soreness in your legs, chest, arms, and head. It is important that we understand what this means. If there is tightness in a muscle after a workout it is important to stretch that muscle out, drink lots of fluids, soak in a warm bath with some Epsom salt and get extra sleep that night. It is best to ice while in a stretch position. If the soreness prevents you from walking normally more stretching needs to be done. If the soreness persists, if there is any bruising, or if you cannot function properly an evaluation should be done to make sure you are not injured. Running can cause joints in the ankles, knees, hips and back to come out of place. A chiropractor will typically do minor adjustments and it can make a major impact. The sports clinic in Wadena can provide physical therapy options in the cause of an injury. If you have a severe headache after running it is probably a sign of dehydration and you should consume fluids with electrolytes in them such as sports drinks or fruit juices. The reason it is important to tell the difference between sore and injured is because after hard workouts we are attempting to break the body down so it builds up stronger. This causes some muscle fatigue and soreness and is normal. This soreness is alright to run through and work through as you are becoming stronger. To try and run through an injury can make the injury worse and last longer though.

If you are unable to finish the workout in 3 consecutive practices because of an injury, you will be required to be evaluated before you are able to practice again. In the evaluation process you will need a signed note from the doctor, physical therapist or chiropractor stating the extent of the injury, therapy that is being done and when you can resume running.

Equipment Needed for Running

Shoes - We recommend going to a store that deals primarily with running equipment or that has an experienced runner as their salesperson. Things you should you pay attention to when buying a new pair of shoes:

1. It helps to buy a good shoe. The shoe should feel good on your feet. It is not necessary for you to get the most expensive one to run. As for cheap shoes, there is a reason they are cheap. They can cause more problems than it is worth. Your feet take the most abuse in running so remember the old saying "you get what you pay for".
2. You treat your running shoes the same as you do when buying regular shoes. Make sure you have some room at the tip of your shoe. In the shoe fitting world it is recommended to leave a space the width of your thumb between the top of your toe to the end of the shoe. This allows some room for growth and helps with any foot swelling from a hard run. It is also best to shop for a shoe towards the end of the day. This will give your foot the best fit for new shoes.
3. Always designate a pair for your training and another for racing. These shoes should be kept separate from ones used for other activities. With all the running you can go through a pair very quickly. I strongly recommend a new pair of running shoes at the beginning of every new season. Your racing shoes will last a little longer, so those will probably only need to be replaced when outgrown.

Clothing - Uniforms are checked out to each athlete at the beginning of the season to use during school meets and Saturday Invitationals. For practice a t-shirt and running shorts are fine. Clean, dry socks are important for prevention of blisters, fungus, and other foot ailments that can occur. Uniforms are to be turned in at the end of the cross country season. Should the jersey or shorts be lost during the season the runner is responsible for the replacement cost of the item. The coach will advise you of the cost.

Team Gear - Also each year a Team Gear are designed for runners to purchase and is one of our fundraisers. Each year we try to purchase gear that the runners may wear

over their uniform before races. The gear is a great team bond, but is not required for purchase.

Watches - Although not necessary, watches are good for runners to be able to see how they are pacing themselves either during practice or during a meet.

Race Day

Pre Meet Preparation — The coach will give instructions for the athletes. What parents can do before school meets is check with your child to see where the best place to watch may be or ask returning parents from prior year. For Invitational meets you can go online to determine the course route. Again, check with returning runners or parents to find out the best places to watch or take pictures from.

During invitationals there are many races that will occur during the course of the meet. Most Saturday meets last about half a day to mid afternoon. It is important to find out what time your child is racing so you won't miss the start of the race.

Once the coach has checked in the team a race number, number bid, and/or race chip for racing shoes will be distributed to each assigned runner. Usually before the races begin the team is allowed to walk the course to familiarize themselves with it. About 45 minutes before the assigned race the participating team will warm up by jogging around the grounds and stretching. At the starting line the coach may give some last minute instructions. As soon as the team starts warming up it is important that parents and family go to cheer, allowing the runner and coach to prepare for the race.

The Race – Unlike other sports, spectators do not stay in one place to watch the race. They usually move from point to point on the course and cheer on the team. Check with returning runners or parents to get an idea of the best place to watch your child's race from. A quick note of caution: it is against the rules to run alongside a runner and pace them. You can also not give them any water while they're running the race. These will get your child disqualified.

End of Race — As a runner passes the finish line they go into a chute where they are lined up according to the way they finished. The runner reports their race number of turns in their race tag to the people that are collecting it. It is the runner's responsibility to make sure the tag is collected. After a race we have the runner hang out at finish to cheer on their teammates who are still finishing. The coaches will have a quick meeting with runners. When a race is completed the runners will warm down as a group and then go on to cheer their other teammates as they race.

Important Notes – It is common after a race is over to see runners weak in the knees, stumbling in a fainting like manner, overall weakness, glossy eyes, and nausea. These symptoms generally pass quickly. After a race is over it is a good thing for them to drink water or gatorade. This replaces the lost fluids and the electrolytes that typically are lost during a race of this magnitude. It is not recommended to give them juice or soda for at least 15 minutes after completing a race because it sometimes can cause them nausea.

Scoring and Awards

The object is to get as few points as possible. The lowest possible score in Cross Country is fifteen. In the race, the first place finisher is scored as 1 point, second place is 2 points, and so on and so forth. Scores are added from the top five finishers of each team even though teams have seven running in varsity and an unlimited number in other divisions. So if you have a large gathering of athletes where there are 150 runners or more, it's not uncommon to see team scores well over 100 points.

Example 1:

Teal Team placed 1 2 7 9 10 11 13 (team score = $1+2+7+9+10=29$)

White Team placed 3 4 5 6 8 12 16 (team score = $3+4+5+6+8=26$)

Team White wins 26-29

Example 2:

Black Team 1 4 5 7 11 12 13 (team score = $1+4+5+7+11=28$)

Gray Team 2 3 6 8 9 10 14 (team score = $2+3+6+8+9=28$)

When there is a tie in cross country you go to the 6th place runner. The team who has the best 6th place finish wins. So in the above example the winner would be the Gray Team because their 6th runner placed 10th whereas the Black Team's 6th runner finished 12th.

Awards — Medals and trophies are given out at a lot of our races. For most meets the awards conclude the finish of a race, but in some meets awards could be handed out at the finish line. In some meets the varsity runners of the winning team receive either a medal, trophy or plaque. Individual medals will be given out up to a predetermined placement such as the top 15. Each meet will list their specifications for giving out Awards.

Cross Country Awards Banquet – At the end of the season we host an Awards Banquet for all athletes who participated and represented the school in cross country. Location TBA at the end of the season.

Expectations

As coaches we set our expectations high. Coaching takes time away from our families and we would not do it if we didn't expect great things out of the athletes we coach. We will not accept a losing attitude and we will not tolerate athletes that don't want to get better after every race. We would not have taken this coaching position if we didn't believe that every single athlete we coach has the potential to be GREAT if they come with a positive attitude and an appropriate work ethic!

As coaches, we expect that..

- A full effort is given every day in practice and at every meet
- Throughout the course of the season running gets easier, faster, and times get lower
- We operate as a team
- Running is a positive, lifelong activity. No negative comments.
- You come to practice every day to put forth a great workout! If you are going to miss practice you NEED TO TALK TO ONE OF THE COACHES. Our numbers are listed here, text or call if you are gone from school or going to miss practice for any reason. Cross Country is different from other sports. If you do not get your workouts as planned you will fall behind.
- Lastly, I expect to always have fun! The best feeling in the world is going for a good hard run and feeling energized at the end of it instead of worn out. We will get you to that point sometime during the season!

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact one of us. We are extremely excited to have you out and running and we look forward to another great season!!

Coach Nick Jasmer

218-639-4205 (cell); njasmer@menahga.k12.mn.us

Coach Ed Heltunen

218-248-9691 (cell); eheltunen@gmail.com

Coach Nicole Oyster

218-371-1770 (cell); noyster@sebeka.k12.mn.us

Team Rules

- No half effort workouts
 - It is a waste of your time, your coach's time and your teammates time if you don't do the workout the way we have planned. This sport is about improving yourself as a runner and a person and you should not (and your coaches will not) accept anything less than your best effort each and every day!
- If you're not passing you're not playing
- You must be in school the entire day to participate in practices and meets. If you are tardy to the first hour you will not be able to participate but will be expected to attend. Excused absences are fine.
- You must be in school, on time, the day after a meet unless there is prior approval from one of the coaches. IF you are late, you will need to come to the meet but will not be allowed to participate.
- If we leave early for meets you are responsible for telling your teacher prior to the meet and obtaining work before we leave
- If you are going home with a parent you need them to sign you out with one of the coaches
- If you are going home with someone else you will need a signed note from the athletic director or Principal saying it is alright that you do so.
- No smoking or chewing
- No drinking alcohol
- No drinking caffeine or energy drinks. Caffeine is a dehydrator that will lower your performance plus put undue stress on your heart that can cause catastrophic effects during workouts or races
- No cell phones during practice
- If you cannot attend practice because of work or other obligations you need to okay it with the coaches and get your workout for the day. Captions will not be allowed to miss practice for work or other non-specific reasons
- If you have more than 1 unexcused practice you will be required to miss the next meet but still come as a manager
- If you are injured and are treated by a doctor you need a signed doctor's note saying that you are alright to begin practice again before you can practice or compete.
- No profanity
- No complaining
- No shortcuts

- Be careful on the roads; never run more than 2 wide and run facing traffic as much as possible
- Spots on varsity will be earned based on times but can be pulled at the coach's discretion.
- ***On the bus: boys sit with boys, girls sit with girls.***

Captains, Lettering and Team Policies

Captains will be selected on Warrior Day; 1-2 female and 1-2 male captains will be designated by the coaches and will be expected to be at all practices unless they are ill. There will be an attempt made to have one from each school but no guarantees on that.

If you are injured you must still attend practice.

Unexcused missed practices will result in missing the next meet.

If you are going to need to miss a practice either Coach Heltunen, Coach Jasmer, or Coach Oyster need to be notified **BEFORE** practice. You can text us and let us know if need be (numbers on the bottom of these sheets)

Please try to ride the bus back with the team. It is a great team bonding experience! If you cannot ride home you need a parent to sign you out. If you are riding home with someone other than your parents a note needs to be okayed by the athletic director and principal at your school.

NO NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

Letter policies include scoring varsity points (top 7 runners from our team) at a meet, winning all conference as an individual or the 7 runners on a team that wins conference, going to state as an individual or the top 9 runners on a state bound team, being a senior that has participated for the previous 3 years, or any other outstanding contribution an athlete makes to the team. If there are any drug or alcohol violations the athlete will not letter regardless of the other terms. Coaches have discretion over the above policies if an athlete is deemed detrimental to the team or exhibits outstanding team behavior.

Abide by the rules and regulations of the schools and the Minnesota State High School League

Tips on Training, Relieving Sore Muscles, Keeping Your Legs in Running Form

- 8 hours of sleep
 - Your body recovers and strengthens as it sleeps
- Good, healthy food habits! Stay away from fast food and junk food if you can.
 - A well balanced diet is going to help any athlete's performance. If you want to make dietary changes it should be gradual and you may want to consult a Nutrition expert. On competition days such items as high fat, fried foods, sodas, and highly acidic drinks should be avoided.
 - You need good energy stored to stay at the high energy level we will be practicing and competing at.
 - Chicken, fish and eggs provide good proteins. Fruit and veggies provide vitamins and nutrients our muscles need to fire along with some fluid.
- It is recommended eating a diet that is high in carbohydrates, which is excellent fuel for a cross country runner. We understand that everybody's dietary needs are different, but it is usually better to go into a race on the hungry side than to overeat which can cause cramping or feeling of being nauseous.
- 2 days before a meet, eat a lot of carbs such as pastas.
- Stay hydrated
 - The more hydrated you are the better your blood system can transport oxygen to your muscles which allows for better, faster, quicker, stronger, muscle movement
 - If your body is hydrated you are less likely to pull muscles
 - If your body is hydrated you can clear lactic acid (the stuff that makes you sore) much quicker and easier
 - Distance runners should be drinking about 8 glasses of water during each day and even more on hot and humid days. Not only is water consumption important for hydration, but consuming fluids with electrolytes. A ratio of 3:1 of water to an electrolyte like Gatorade twice a day is suggested on a daily basis during training and competing.
- Stretch when you wake up and before you go to sleep
- Ice as needed
 - It is best to ice while stretching.
- Wear good running shoes (see page Equipment Needed for more info)
- Don't let sore shins fester. If they hurt, the best remedy is to stretch, ice, cross train, and get in to a chiropractor or massage therapist and get an adjustment to help loosen up those calf muscles

Communication

Parents and Athletes, please add the GroupMe app on your phone.



This is our **main communication** tool for our team correspondence. We will update it with any changes in practice times, we will provide addresses for location of meets and time of races, we will also post pictures from our events.

After adding the App, search for UNC Cross Country 2026.

Please let one of the coaches know if you have any trouble adding this to your phone.

We also have a Facebook and Instagram Page

Facebook: UNC Warrior Cross Country

Instagram: unc_cross country

All communications between a coach and an athlete/parent/guardian must be professional in nature and for the purpose of communicating information about the athlete and or team activities. The content and intent of all electronic communications must adhere to this policy.

With respect to electronic communications, a simple test that can be used in most cases is whether the electronic communication is Transparent, Accessible and Professional (T.A.P.).

Transparent: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes/parents/guardians should be transparent. Your communication should not only be clear and direct, but also free of hidden meanings, innuendo and expectations.

Accessible: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be considered a matter of record and part of the cross country teams records.

Professional: All electronic communication between a coach and an athlete/parent/guardian should be conducted professionally as a representative of our team. This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a team member.

Types of messaging:

TEXTING: Subject to the general guidelines mentioned above, texting is allowed between coaches and athletes/parents/guardians during the hours from 7am until 9pm. Texting only shall be used for the purpose of communicating information directly related to team activities.

EMAIL: Athletes and coaches may use email to communicate between the hours of 7am and 9pm.

GROUPME: UNC Cross Country recommends coaches, athletes, and parents/guardians to use the **GroupMe app** as much as possible. This messaging system provides methods(group messages and direct messaging) that athletes and parents/guardians can utilize to communicate with coaches and the team and to follow for information and updates on team related matters.

FACEBOOK: UNC cross country has an official Facebook page that athletes and their parents/guardians can “friend” for information and updates on team related matters for this current year and for subsequent years when you are no longer a direct part of the team but would like to continue to follow the team.

REQUEST TO DISCONTINUE ALL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS The parents or guardians of an athlete reserve the right that their child not be included in any direct communications by coaches through any form of electronic communication and would like them to only be a part of whole team messaging.

Please read this information in our handbook. It is very important to the success of each athlete and our team. After reading, please sign and return this last page to Coach Heltunen or Coach Jasmer. Thanks!

Date: _____

Athlete Signature _____

Parent/Guardian Signature(s) _____

Opt Out:

_____ I would prefer my athlete not be included in any direct messages from coaches and would prefer to relay all personal information about my athlete to the coaches and from the coaches to my athlete.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____