



October 21, 2026

NFHS Cross Country Weekly Rule Interpretations

Preparing for Championship Cross Country Meets

As the regular season concludes and championship season begins, the stakes rise for athletes, coaches, and officials as well. Championship meets bring added pressure, larger crowds, stricter protocols, and tighter schedules. For officials, preparation is key to ensuring the event runs smoothly and fairly.

Athletes train all season for this moment; your officiating should reflect that same level of excellence. Be alert, consistent, and confident in your calls. Be professional and approachable as tensions can run high at state meets. Stay composed, calm, and courteous. A clear explanation and a respectful tone can defuse most difficult situations.

Prior to arriving at the meet, review the NFHS rules and state association terms and conditions for the meet. Do they have any exceptions to NFHS rules? Confirm your assigned role and area of responsibility well in advance. Be prepared for any kind of weather this time of year.

Upon arriving at the site, the meet referee should inspect the course and the course marking. The first step for officials is to walk and visually inspect the course. Confirm that the route is clearly and consistently marked with flags, cones, or chalk, and that any intersections are easy to follow. Pay special attention to potential hazards such as uneven ground, exposed tree roots, or standing water. If issues are identified, work with meet management to address them before athletes arrive at the line. A properly marked and safe course not only prevents confusion but also minimizes the risk of injury.

The starting area should be wide enough to accommodate all teams fairly, with starting boxes clearly identified and evenly spaced. There should be a 2-inch-wide starting line marked, and a good rule of thumb is that each box be a width of the number of teams multiplied by 6 feet. NFHS rules recommend that boxes be numbered from left to right facing the running area.

Make sure you have an officials' meeting before the start of the first race. Go over any details of emergency protocols for the course and procedures for a downed athlete. Make sure everyone knows the protocol for weather adjustments if necessary. When safety protocols are addressed before the race, officials are better prepared to act quickly if the unexpected occurs.

During the day, officials should stay neutral and objective as you may encounter unfamiliar teams, higher levels of emotion, and increased scrutiny. Stick to the facts, rely on the rules book, and trust your training. The integrity of the event starts with the official's attention to detail.

Championship meets are a celebration of high school cross country. Your preparation and professionalism as an official are critical to creating a fair and memorable experience for every athlete. Thank you for your commitment to excellence, now let's finish the season strong.

SITUATION 1: Upon arriving at the state championship cross country meet, which is held at a local golf course, Team A's coach protests to the referee that the course does not have painted or chalked directional lines to assist the runners. Instead, there is a series of small "surveyor"-type colored flags marking the course direction. **RULING:** The protest is denied. **COMMENT:** Survey-type flags are permitted when the venue will not allow the use of a painted or chalk line across the club fairways. (8-1-3)

SITUATION 2: At the completion of a cross country state qualifying meet, it is discovered that a participant who had not been entered in the meet for Team B illegally entered the course and crossed the finish line. The referee disqualified the illegal participant and all members of Team B. Since B1 and B2 finished in the top 10 as individuals, the coach of Team B asks if these runners would advance to the state finals as individuals. **RULING:** Since all members of Team B were disqualified, B1 and B2 shall not place in the meet and shall record no times. Unless state association policy determines otherwise, B1 and B2 cannot advance. (4-6-3, 8-6-1)

SITUATION 3: During the state cross country championships, the umpire at the 2000-meter turn observes A1 thrusting an elbow into B1 causing B1 to slow down and be passed by several other runners. The umpire signals with a yellow flag and reports the incident to the referee at the conclusion of the race. **RULING:** A1 is disqualified and Team A's total points (top 5 places) are re-scored as if A1 did not compete in the race. **COMMENT:** Although there are frequent incidental contacts (especially on turns) in cross country, flagrant/unsporting conduct cannot be tolerated. (8-6-1)

SITUATION 4: In the final stretch of a cross country meet, A1 appears to be shaky, displaying lack of balance, and extremely fatigued. A1 then falls to the ground and attempts to crawl to the finish line. A medical official, approved by the games committee, comes to evaluate the downed runner (A1) and (a) walks alongside and talks with the athlete as the athlete crawls, (b) helps A1 to their feet and determines A1 can complete the race on their own, (c) helps A1 to their feet and assists A1 toward the finish line. **RULING:** (a) and (b) Legal, even though A1 was helped to their feet for the medical evaluation, A1 did not receive aid from the designated health-care professional; (c) illegal, A1 was assisted along the prescribed course toward the finish line and completion of the race. **COMMENT:** The games committee will establish appropriate health-care professionals for a meet. These individuals may evaluate a downed competitor on the course during a race without resulting in disqualification provided no assistance is given in progressing along the course. (8-6-1)