**Cross Country Racing Strategies / Tips**

Being a successful cross country runner is more than just a simple matter of fitness. It is important to know how to race. There are no opportunities in the middle of the race to take a timeout and reevaluate your strategy. It is important to have a clear goal before each race and a strategy by which to accomplish that goal (this will also help to reduce pre-race jitters). Your race plan may change depending on the race (e.g. a different goal for a dual meet vs. an invitational), and it is often helpful to try different strategies throughout the season to determine which works best for you.

Pacing Tips:

* Make sure not to get pulled out too quickly in the first few hundred meters. While it is important to get a good start, it’s easy to overshoot it. Remember: you can’t win a cross country race in the first half-mile, but you can lose it.
* Your mile splits should be relatively consistent. The spread between your fastest mile and your slowest mile should be less than 30 seconds.
* As the race progresses, the same pace will feel more difficult. If you maintain the same effort level throughout the race, you will slow down. Keep pushing and stay mentally locked in.

Race Positioning:

* Race positioning is less important in a cross country race than it is on a track. Don’t worry about getting into the perfect position right from the gun. Remember that it is a long race and stay patient.
* Try to steadily pass people throughout the race. Consider each move ahead as a victory. Don’t lose focus if someone passes you back, just keep trying to move up.
* Most courses have at least a few sections where the path narrows considerably. For these sections, positioning does matter. Often, these sections will come late enough in the race that there should still be room to keep moving up.
  + NOTE: If you do get into a spot where you want to pass someone but don’t have room to safely do so, wait until you do have room.

Terrain-Based Tips:

* Running Hills
  + Uphills: Keep an even rhythm. Run strong, but don’t accelerate. Once you get near the top of the hill, push through the crest and try to hold your speed.
  + Downhill: Relax into the downhills. Speed up a little, but don’t sprint. Use these segments of the race to recharge your legs. Be very careful on long or steep downhills. It’s easy to run too fast down these, which will not only burn through your energy reserves but also increases your chances of falling.
* Running Woods/Tight Trails
  + Be careful of your footing. Tree roots can be an issue (although they will usually be spray-painted for easy visibility).
  + However, make sure not to let your pace lag in these segments. It is easy to slow down without realizing it. If you feel good, try to surge every time you go around a blind corner.

Additional Tips:

* Don’t key too much on specific runners from other teams. You don’t know their strategy for the race or their current fitness level. Their goal for a particular race and their strategy for achieving that goal might not be what is best for you.
* If possible, run with a teammate. You will know each other’s capabilities and can push each other when the race gets tough.