

FAQ Section:

Participation: Athletes must have an athletic physical and insurance prior to practicing. These items are available in the athletic office, through me at practice, or on the school website under the athletic department page - I think they have also been made available through school registration. I have enclosed copies with this letter. If an athlete shows up to practice without these items they will be given the proper form but will not be allowed to practice. An exception would be if an athlete has a physical that has not expired from the previous year. There is a one-month grace period given from the expiration date of the physical. Ex: A physical given 08-08-16 would be good until 09-08-17.

Expectation(s)/Practices: We expect all athletes to be at practice on time (3:30 beginning Monday, August 14th) and ready to run. Wednesday's practices sometimes start a little later because of teacher meetings, but we are sticking to the 3:30 practice time. If a runner is gone from school **it is his responsibility (or the parent's) to call/text a coach and leave a message. An e-mail to one of our school addresses before practice time would also be sufficient.** If I have not received a message prior to practice time and a runner misses practice, then he will be reprimanded. It's not fair to the rest of the team to sit around waiting for someone who is not going to be there. Athletes who have chosen to go out for Cross Country need to be at practice and finish practice. **If an athlete cuts practice, a meet, a meeting, or does anything behaviorally that contradicts the values of our program (or the rules detailed in the student handbook), they run the risk of being immediately removed from our team. We are here to coach and reap the rewards of hard work. Athletes who are not interested in that should not be running Cross Country.**

Practices are 1-2 hours in length depending on the day. Mondays and Thursdays are usually longer days, while Friday and pre-meet practices are only about 45 minutes. Bottom-line, if runners are there on time, and we don't have extra information to cover, we should be done between 5:00-5:30. Saturday practices are required for Varsity runners only (occasionally I will invite 9/10 or JV runners to Saturday practices, but for the most part those runners need Saturday and Sunday as rest days). We typically meet at the high school at 7:00 a.m. (determined by the Varsity).

Varsity Lettering: 4 ways to earn a Varsity letter in Boys Cross Country.

(1) Consistently scoring in the top 5 of Varsity races (top 5 = points that count for our team score).

(2) Consistently running in the top 7 of Varsity races (#6 and #7 runners play an important role of providing us depth and consistency among the Varsity).

*Neither of these two ways has a set number of times a runner must have run on the Varsity, but are instead analyzed through my observations in meet results primarily. Through 24 years as a coach (18 at Indianola), this criteria is historically very cut and dry. Rarely is there a circumstance where I have to sit down and decide if a runner has qualified for a letter having been in the Top 7.

(3) 4 years of participation in Cross Country. 4 years of putting in the miles, working hard, being a good teammate, etc., is deserving of a Varsity letter.

(4) Coach's discretion. Occasionally an athlete might not meet the above criteria yet we as coaches feel he has earned a letter (i.e. perhaps an athlete was only out as a sophomore, junior and senior, yet displayed a hard work ethic, leadership and a sprinkling of Varsity races).

The Cross Country athletes are made aware at the beginning of the season of what it typically takes to be a Varsity runner. By the end of the season, athletes who score for us usually run under 17:00 minutes for 5K. Athletes who run between 17:30 and 18:00 have a shot of securing a 6th or 7th spot on Varsity. We typically do not put athletes on Varsity who run above 18:00 for 5K. Our program is strong enough to field very competitive teams against any Iowa High School. Placing athletes who run 18:30, 19:00 or slower in a Varsity race is not developmentally appropriate, nor is it a representation of who we are. Below I have provided data to support why these numbers are the baseline for our Varsity team.

Data from the last 10 seasons of Cross Country:

Average time of our #1 runner at the end of the year - 16:19
Average time of our #5 runner at the end of the year - 17:13
Average time of our #1-5 runners at the end of the year - 16:48
Average time of our #7 runner at the end of the year - 17:43

Additionally, there are clubs at our high school that offer different Varsity lettering opportunities through a point system that shows a level of inclusion that a Varsity sport does not. We feel these are not comparable and we are not interested in watering down our lettering procedures. There is pride in the exclusiveness of being a Varsity Letter Winner for Boys Cross Country; we plan to keep it that way.

****Coach Kim Arndt and myself have aligned our lettering procedures multiple times during our tenure and are basically on the same page.***

Running a Full/Partial Varsity Squad:

My philosophy each fall is to use the months of July, August, and September to do the work to allow guys to run their best in October. While placing well at early meets is always nice, it is the last three meets of the year that measure our success. I would say our home meet, Wartburg and Fort Dodge Invitationals would also be meets where we want to start firing on all cylinders. Our home invitational is usually around September 23rd - we like to look good there! By the time the Varsity heads to Wartburg (formerly Clinton) the following Friday I want our #1-7 set for the final push of October. The Fort Dodge meet is a great time for ALL runners to get a personal best before heading to Conference. That being said, Conference, Districts and State are the main focus of our season.

With that in mind, putting the "next man in" early on in the year is a practice I usually avoid. Athletes do far better running within their specific ability groups rather than racing up a level against competition above their pay grades. The Knoxville Invitational is a better time of the season (with more appropriate competition) for young or inexperienced, traditionally non-Varsity athletes, to have a chance to run up a level. By that point in the

season they have several races under their belts, and have a high level of conditioning to give a good effort.

The bottomline is the clock/stopwatch is our measuring stick. Varsity athletes run Varsity performances. I will not run athletes at the Varsity level unless they show a potential (from previous races or practices) to be at that level.

If our team takes a step back and does not uphold the standards that have been set, at that time I will be forced to reevaluate what our Varsity looks like.

Encouragement of Athletes:

Coach Garrels and I do our very best to be encouraging to athletes whether that be in the form of humor, comments during practice, meets, texts messages, brief talks in the hallways or very serious talks after a race. There are a wide variety of ways to show encouragement to athletes. Knowing the best way, or amount, of encouragement to show 30 different athletes is a challenging task. All I can say is that we do our best and will continue to do our best to help athletes feel like they belong to our program and are working toward the same goals regardless of the level at which they run.

When I hear of an athlete who has not felt supported on our squad I take it very seriously. That feeling would be the exact opposite of our intended inclusion on our team. That being said, there is an expectation from us as coaches that athletes give their best, attend practices, and challenge themselves. Varsity athletes in particular are held to a slightly higher standard. Lead by example is very much the law of our program. It starts with the coaches enduring what the athletes endure (we run what they run - we do the hardest version of whatever the workout is for that day). The Varsity follows our lead and this trickles down to the remaining members of the team (whether they be young runners, or older JV runners).

The only other comment I might add to this, is that we expect athletes to grow and become better runners through their own hard work. We are not selective. Athletes who buy into what we are doing separate themselves through their own discipline. We will push them in the right direction as best as we can, but at the end of the day, they are the ones driving forward; they are the ones racing the clock.

Training Philosophy: I am a strength-based coach. I believe in building endurance as a runner before attempting to make a runner fast. A runner who is strong will have greater gains and fewer injuries over the course of a season. With the help of Indianola Head Athletic Trainer (Josh Lawrence) the Indianola Boys Cross Country team has a history of being very healthy and running their best times at the end of the season.

How long will my son have to run? Some of the runners have been running since the end of June and are ready for a higher level of conditioning. They will have more difficult workouts. Those starting to run in August will build gradually. Expect new runners to the program to be running 3-4 miles at a comfortable pace for them. Varsity runners, or veteran athletes, will run as much as 10 miles on our longer runs, but will run 4-7 miles during those same early runs.

Injuries: If your son is injured please make sure he has notified us so we can take care of it before things get worse. Most runners have done a good job of keeping us informed of pains. Sometimes an athlete doesn't want to complain about something - unfortunately things progress rapidly from there. It is best to complain! Injuries need to be dealt with proactively.

If a runner is injured, we can have him meet with Josh for an initial diagnosis. He does a great job of working toward a solution to running injuries. Certainly there are times when the parent will have to be involved and the athlete will see a family physician.

Communication among runner, coach, athletic trainer, and parent are the keys to staying healthy.

Meet Transportation: Runners are required to ride the bus to all meets unless an arrangement has been made prior to meet day. Parents can take their son home from the meet, but **must sign off** on the roster at the meet. A parent can take another runner home, but a **note from the athlete's parent** must be given to the coach stating which parent is taking his/her son. If there is no note, then we need to get a parent by **phone** or the runner is riding the bus.

Transportation home from practice is at the runner's discretion. If a runner has asked another runner for a ride home, the coaches do not interfere with that. If you as a parent don't want your child riding with another runner at anytime, please contact us so we can make a note of that.

Equipment: Runners will be issued Hind or Adidas uniforms to race in. They may also be issued warm-ups, although some athletes choose not to check these out. **Please wash all items in cold water and line dry.** If the uniform(s) or warm-ups are returned in unsatisfactory condition, you will be forced to pay the full price to replace them (**\$60-\$120**).

I will be explaining this to the athletes, but I require runners to wear our team colors (black, purple, yellow/gold, grey, white) when attending a XC meet. While we try and provide our teams with like uniforms and warm-ups, we do provide a certain amount of flexibility for each athlete in regard to being comfortable on race day. That being said, the runners should be very proud to be running for Indianola and we expect our school colors to be worn at meets.

I will be speaking with runners about shoes. Running is a fairly inexpensive sport; however appropriate running shoes are an item needed to train successfully. Having the right footwear is important. Some runners purchase additional shoes (flats or spikes) for racing. While this is recommended, it is not required.

The most knowledgeable place to buy shoes is Fitness Sports (8810 Swanson Blvd. Clive). They give a discount and provide shoes that are specific to the needs of each individual's running style. I always check shoes of all runners during the first few weeks of practice and have individual conversations if I feel like a switch in shoes would be a good idea. Our trainer Josh is a great source as well. He can look at an athlete's shoes and recommend make/model that would be beneficial.

Team Meals: Parents or groups of parents have sponsored team dinners at their homes each of the past 17 years I have been head coach. Dinners are held the night before a meet and usually consist of pasta, salad, drinks (water, Gatorade, etc.) and cookies. If you would like to sponsor a meal please contact Coach Barnes. Don't feel like you have to do everything; I can team you up with someone to help. These dinners have been wonderfully done and the runners and coaches greatly appreciate it. The following dates are available for sign up to help or host (note - because of various issues we do not ask for a team dinner prior to all XC meets):

Wednesday, September 6th

Monday, September 11th

Wednesday, September 20th

Monday, September 25th

Thursday, October 5th – bring food for after the Ft. Dodge meet (long trip!)

The district and state meets will be decided at a later time. There is no dinner before the Warburg Invitational as we are traveling on Friday the 29th of September (**this is a Varsity only meet - top 7 runners**). Thank you again for supporting our program. We work with tremendous student athletes and there are tremendous parents behind the scenes.