



Cross Country Handbook

2026-2027

Commitment from Coaches

Welcome to Wheeler Cross Country. This year promises to be an exciting one for you and your child. This handbook is designed to help you with any questions or concerns you may have about Cross Country.

Runners will have the opportunity to learn the important life skills of wise time management, leadership, and teamwork while improving their fitness and self-confidence. Such life skills contribute positively to a person's performance on the playing field, in school, and life beyond the classroom. Acquisition of these skills requires discipline, conditioning, and commitment. It is not a sport for those that like "instant gratification". Instead, it rewards hard work, patience, and the ability to know that you are working towards something that will make the effort worthwhile later.

Our program has a schedule that includes competition in a variety of invitational and championship meets. As coaches, we will work to ensure that each runner achieves his or her personal goals as we prepare the team for the championship meets. Our training philosophy is tailored toward developing an individual runner's strengths, with an emphasis on total fitness and efficiency. The goal of the coaching staff is to guide each member of the team to achieve his or her very best. We will work to create and maintain a supportive environment for the runners both academically and athletically.

This sport can be intimidating at first, but the best advice is to give it time. There are countless stories of runners who showed up to their first practice and quickly decided they did not like it, only to do a 180 and decide that they loved it after the first race. There is something about knowing that if you do the work, you are almost guaranteed to improve.

Follow us!

Instagram:

@XC_Wheeler

The Season

The following dates define the start and dates of the 2026 Cross-Country season:

- Summer training will start on June 1, 2026. We will not be training on June 29th- July 5 (Dead Week).
- Summer Workouts will be Mon at Chattahoochee Cochran Shoals Entrance and Tues and Thurs from 7:30a-9a @ Wheeler.
- School Year Practices will be Mon at Chattahoochee Cochran Shoals Entrance from 4:15-5:45 and Tues, Wed, and Thurs from 3:45p-5:45p starting at the Wheeler Track. Athletes are responsible for their own transportation to and from ALL practices.
- The fall season will officially begin on Monday, August 3rd, 2026.
- Team Tryouts/ Time Trials to determine team positions to start the season for the boys and girls will be on Wednesday, August 6th @ 3:45 at the track.
- County Meet - 2nd weekend of September
- Sectional Meet - 1st weekend of November
- State Meet- 2nd weekend of November (qualifiers only)
- Athletes are expected to complete the Cross-Country season in its entirety before moving on to other sports.

The Sport

The following is a quick outline of what Cross Country is all about:

- Races are 3.1 miles (referred to as a 5K) or occasionally 3 miles or even 2 miles (stage races, middle school)
- The score is kept on a personal basis (how an individual finished in a race) and on a team basis with 7 or 10 runners in Varsity races.
- Meets are scored by adding up the finish places of the first 5 runners. The lowest score wins. A perfect race is 15 points (1+2+3+4+5=15). 6th place is the tiebreaker if needed.

The Commitment

The official Cross-Country season goes from August to the beginning of November. However, to be among the best teams and runners, the training must extend beyond those months. The most crucial time for a runner is the summer. Summer mileage is the key to a successful season in the fall. The teams that succeeded in October and November at Region and State are the teams that had numerous runners grinding out the miles in June-August.

Distance running is a sport and skill that builds cumulatively throughout the school year. Ideally, an athlete would compete in Cross Country in the fall and Track in the spring. However, we also welcome any other athletes who want to get into shape for another sport that starts after Cross Country (Wrestling, Swimming, Basketball, Baseball, Soccer, etc). We have many athletes who run in the fall and play other sports throughout the year.

Each workout is important to the overall schedule for the season.

Whether it's an easier day of normal mileage or a hard workout, each day serves a purpose. Athletes who cannot complete the workout schedule or commit to training effectively do not have a fair opportunity to succeed as much as those who do. We ask athletes to schedule every possible appointment around workouts when possible. Those athletes missing practice for an unexcused reason are subject to missing the next meet at the coach's discretion. They are also expected to attend the banquet at the end of the season. We hope parents agree that the immense benefits of Cross Country more than outweigh the time commitment involved. This sport rewards the committed athlete and parent, but our athletes have time for top-notch academics, church, extracurricular activities, and even work if they desire to budget their time. So many parents have been pleasantly surprised to see grades go up while their child participated in Cross Country.

Expectations

1. **Time Trial Cuts:** Returning Girls are expected to run the two miles in 19 minutes or less. Returning boys are expected to run the two mile in 18 minutes or less. New Girl runners are expected to run the two mile in 20 minutes or less. New boy runners are expected to run the two mile in 19 minutes or less.
2. **Attendance Policy for Meets and Practices:** Practices are just as important as meets. Two practice absences in a week remove you from racing that week. Two tardies equal one absence. Showing up to practice after 40 minutes also counts as an absence. Missing two meets (unexcused) results in immediate removal from the team. Coaches have discretion to make final decisions. Please also pay attention to the Wheeler Cross Country Lettering Policy for attendance.
3. **Adherence to All School District Policies:** Students are expected to abide by the discipline code in the Cobb County Student Handbook and the Wheeler High School Student Handbook both at practices and at meets. This includes all expectations regarding language, sportsmanship, attendance rules, chemical use, behavior, and academics. Student-athletes who are suspended or assigned to ISS are not allowed to participate in activities during the time of disciplinary action.

4. **Sportsmanship:** Cross Country is a sport that prides itself on the character of its participants. Runners represent not only themselves but also WHS and the sport of Cross Country. Participants should demonstrate good sportsmanship in behavior and language. Use your energy to cheer on your teammates with positive comments. Unsportsmanlike conduct such as berating an opponent, complaining about an official's calls, making obscene gestures or cheers, etc., will result in disciplinary action. We expect members of our team to be true examples of good sportsmanship *at all times*.
5. **Respect for others:** Our runs take us out into the community, so, even when you are off school grounds, you are still representing WHS and the Cross-Country team. Treat community members, course officials, parents, coaches, teammates, and members of other teams with respect. Be especially respectful of drivers who give you the right of way or create extra room for you to run. Do not retaliate with gestures or words if others do not give you the respect you want.
6. **Respect for Property and Equipment:** As we run through the streets, remember that cars, bicycles, toys, trees, etc., belong to other people. Keep your hands off. Do not run across lawns or cut through shrubs. If other people are using the sidewalks, you be the one to step aside and allow them to pass.
7. **Completion of assigned workouts:** Workouts are designed to allow you to build strength, endurance, and fitness as we progress through the season. They are not random runs but have a plan behind them. All team members must participate in stretching, warming up, cooling down, and the full distance of the run unless one of the coaches assigns a special workout. Don't change a workout distance or assigned route without a coach's permission in advance, and do not accept a ride from anyone except in an emergency. Such an emergency must be reported to a coach immediately.
8. **Keep records:** Write down your training runs and record your meet times. The overall goal of this program is to help you improve. Keeping records helps you see this progress and helps you learn what types of workouts are helping you the most. If everyone on the team can improve his or her time each race, it will be a perfect season.
9. The coaches have the right to remove athletes from the team at their discretion (grades, lack of commitment, attendance issues, poor sportsmanship, disrespectful, etc).

Dues

\$325

This will include all race entry fees, sign up fee, team shirt, and uniform fee.

Uniforms will be returned at the end of season in the same condition they were received in. Failure to return uniforms will result in a student debt. **DO NOT REMOVE TAGS FROM UNIFORMS**

Dues need to be paid by check or via the Wheeler Athletic Association Website.
There will be no refunds for athletic dues, regardless of the circumstance.

Lettering

To earn your Varsity Letter in Cross Country these are the MINIMUM requirements:

1. Runners must compete in a minimum of 5 of the team's meets. They can run in Varsity, Junior Varsity, or Open Races to combine to equal the 5 races. (NOTE: Injuries sustained during the cross country season will not disqualify a runner from receiving a varsity letter).
2. Runners must compete, and positively contribute to the score in, at least three Championship or Varsity races to be considered for a varsity letter.
3. Students must adhere to the Wheeler Cross Country Attendance Policy. Athletes must be in good standing to be considered for lettering. It is the athlete's job to manage their time between schoolwork and practice. Needing to study or write a paper is NOT an excused absence.

**ANOTHER ROUTE: Runners that do not meet the above requirements can earn a letter by meeting all the requirements below:

1. Runners may earn a letter by running in a sanctioned race at these times:

Female: 22:00 minutes and under	Male: 18:30 minutes and under
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2. Seniors who have run the program for a minimum of three years will also be considered for a letter.
3. Must be in good academic standing (see below for grade policy).

****The final determination of Varsity Letter recipients is ultimately the decision of the coaching staff.***

Grade Policy

All cross-country athletes are expected to be responsible student-athletes in the classroom. One of these responsibilities includes passing all of his or her coursework. After the first 6 weeks of school, grades will be monitored every two weeks. If a runner is failing two or more classes, they will be required to do study hall during practice until the grade is brought up, and they will miss meets until the grades are recovered. **This does not count as an excused absence and will go against lettering eligibility.** It is the responsibility of the student to meet with teachers to determine what can be done to bring the grade up. If a student does not bring a grade up to passing by the next two-week check, they will sit out of the meet coming up the following weekend.

Injuries

Cross Country rarely sees any major or long-term injuries, but nagging pains and/or discomfort happen from time to time. This should always be reported to the coach immediately (over time the runner will recognize the difference between soreness and a possible injury). Most injuries can be healed at home by following these simple guidelines: soreness needs stretching, massaging, and heat (heat pad or a warm bath), and tendonitis or inflammation needs icing (10 minutes on, 10 minutes off for an hour) and ibuprofen, if you are ok with your child taking it. Also, athletes can avoid almost all injuries by following the guidelines below:

1. Follow the training program given to you by your coach! Athletes who alter or vary the training schedule are putting themselves at risk for injury. Each workout is designed to build upon the one that went before....altering them hurts recovery time and can prevent continued improvement.
2. Wear proper footwear and monitor it closely! First, make sure you have running shoes and not cross trainers, soccer shoes, etc. Old worn down shoes are the easiest way to get an injury. Generally, you can get 300-500 miles out of a pair of shoes, but some runners wear down shoes faster than others. It is important to monitor the state of your shoes. Also, new shoes can sometimes cause nagging pains as you break them in. Be patient as your body becomes used to your new shoes. A good way to make sure you have the proper shoes is to visit a running specialty store: Big Peach off of Barrett Parkway is an excellent store to purchase shoes. They will watch you run and make a recommendation based on the way your foot hits the ground.
3. Report any injury to the coach! Usually, low-grade pain is not a problem unless it continues for a few days. If an injury is not beginning to improve after 48 hours, please alert the coaches and your parents. Any clicking, popping, or snapping noise should be evaluated by a trained professional. Alert the coach and then follow through immediately with medical treatment.
4. Seek medical help promptly! Athletes are never held responsible for training injuries, but they are responsible for getting medical help for it as soon as possible. If you as a parent or the coach believe that the injury is severe enough to see a Doctor, please schedule an appointment as soon as possible. The quicker the athlete can get on a treatment plan the better.
5. Athletes should make smart decisions outside of practice! Athletes should think twice about participating in any sports or activities during the season that might put them at risk of getting injured. It is always a sad story when a runner misses a big meet because of a neighborhood football game injury, or a skateboarding accident. Common sense can prevent these types of injuries.
6. Create your ice bath! During the season we will have an ice bath as time and space allows. Soaking in an ice bath for 5-6 minutes after a run can reduce inflammation and prevent injuries from occurring. Just make sure you do not have it too cold: an ideal temperature is 50-60 degrees. During the summer we will probably not have time for ice baths, so doing them on your own 1-3 times a week is a good idea.

Practice Protocol

Practice times may change during the season, especially in October when it begins to cool down and get darker sooner. Inclement weather may also force practice times and locations to be changed. Please check your e-mail and the reminder for up-to-date practice times and any changes. You need to be at practice even if you have to be late.

Attendance at practice is expected and mandatory (see above requirements). If a runner is going to miss practice, Coach Ross must be contacted before practice.

Practices will consist of distance and interval workouts. In all workouts, runners must listen to the directions of the coach regarding expected pace intensity and recovery times. Any runner who does not meet the expectation of the practice workout may be held from racing in the upcoming meet.

Runners must be aware of the need to hydrate consistently. Water intake should be limited to 6-8 ounces no later than 20 minutes before practice. Please ensure you bring a water bottle and/or sports drink to consume during and after practice. Runners are also encouraged to bring a healthy snack to eat after practice to help speed up their recovery.

Running off-campus is a privilege afforded to those mature enough to discipline themselves to do so. No athlete will be permitted to run off-campus by themselves. At any time this privilege may be revoked by one of the coaches.

Meet Protocol

Attendance at all meets is mandatory unless excused by Coach Ross before the meet. If a runner cannot attend a meet due to illness or a family/school event, the absence may be excused by the coach in advance of the meet. Injured runners who cannot compete in a race are expected to travel with the team to each meet and support the other runners. When a runner misses a race without a valid reason, they will be disciplined appropriately and may be suspended from future team functions.

All runners must be wearing the team t-shirt on the day of the meet. Uniforms are the individual runner's responsibility. On meet days, being in uniform means not only wearing the shorts and singlet, but also tucking in the singlet and, most importantly, removing jewelry, including necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings, and anklets of any kind. Digital watches are permitted; all other jewelry must be left at home. We must look like a team to compete as a team.

Runners who have finished their race or are waiting for their race are expected to stand along the race course and support their teammates. All runners are always expected to stay through all the races in which Wheeler competes that day.

Rest and Recovery

As athletes, rest and recovery are extremely important to perform at a high level and to

prevent injuries. As a student you are often spread very thin; however, it is important to understand that your body needs an appropriate amount of sleep. As the meet day nears, getting a good night's sleep is very important for the two nights before the race. For the remainder of the week, a student should aim to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep. This is especially important for varsity athletes. Make this a priority in your life.

Sample Weekly Schedule

Monday: Warm Up/Hill Repeats/Cool Down/Core

Tuesday: Mid Distance Run/Upper Body Weights/Strides

Wednesday: Tempo run/Lower Body Weights/Core

Thursday: Long Run/Core/Strides

Friday: Shake Out Run (3-4 Miles- Easy)

Saturday: Race Day/Long Run

Sunday: Rest Day

Other Meet Information

Athletes will meet in front of WHS Early Saturday mornings for transportation to the Meet. The time the meet begins and distance traveled dictates when athletes should arrive; departure time is announced at practice before each meet. Athletes are set up under our large Wheeler Cross Country tent. For parents who plan to attend meets, arrive early and bring cash if possible. Meets can last for many hours, frequently sell concessions, and may charge a parking fee. Also, some meets sell race t-shirts (usually \$15-\$25). You may have to park some distance away from the start, so dress comfortably, wear walking shoes and a hat, and remember your sunscreen. Some parents bring folding chairs and snacks. Some events charge an entry fee for spectators.

Awards

In addition to the Varsity Letter and the Participation Award, the WHS Cross Country Team also presents the following awards at the end-of-the-season banquet to both JV and Varsity runners:

Scholar Athlete: Those athletes exhibiting exceptional scholastic achievement while also lettering in the sport. (freshmen not eligible)

Most Valuable: The outstanding male and female runner on the team.

Most Improved: Given to the runner(s) that shows the greatest improvement over the year.

Spirit: The boy and girl that most exemplify the spirit of a Wheeler athlete.

Rookie of the Year: This is given to exceptional newcomers to the program.

Academic Award: This is given to the individual who has the highest GPA on the team (Athletes must be at least a Junior)

4-year Award: This is given to any runner that has been in the program for at least 4 years and is in good standing with the coaches.

Other awards: These may be given based on team needs.

Other Important Information

Awards Banquet: The end-of-the-year banquet is for ALL runners and their families to reflect upon the cross-country season. This event will honor graduating seniors, runners that letter in cross country, runners that receive an academic patch, runners that have participated ALL season, and just have a fun evening.

Photography: Race Day Photographers are needed to take photos for the end-of-season slideshow to be shown at the banquet.