Cross Country

The start of the school year initiates the Cross Country running season. There are girls and boys competing from nearly all schools in Section II. This great all-weather sport is competed during a majestic time of year in the Capital District and greater northeast. It can be cold and it can be rainy but the weather can also be absolutely beautiful.

Competition venues are on the grounds of local schools, parks, golf courses and occasionally partially on connecting roads. The courses are typically laid out with flags and markings directing the runners through hilly areas, woodlands, meadows and orchards. The beautiful fall foliage and the crisp, clear weather enhance the enjoyment of both the running events and venues.

This sport differs from track and field in many ways, not the least of which is that the distance can be what suits the venue. Some courses are longer than others, some are hilly and others flat, some are wooded and dry, others grassy and any of them can be wet or muddy. However, consistently from year to year, championship and Sectional events are always the same distance. Typically the Sectional meets are held in Saratoga State Park.

It is thrilling to watch the start of a race where several hundred runners are all lined up in boxed areas designated to accommodate each team. A horn or starters pistol brings a mad dash for the first turn or entry into a wooded area and the race is off. Runners fall on the narrow trails, get stepped on, lose shoes in the mud and even get lost on unfamiliar courses or courses that have changed since they were last there. At the end of the race they come around a corner or out of the woods and there is usually a good area for viewing the last few hundred yards of the race. There are often spirited sprints and duels between mostly spent runners striving to beat one another to the finish line. Toward the end of the race it is rewarding to see the same level of effort to beat another and or establish a personal best time for that course. It is possible that the relative position of the last two runners in a race could determine the team score outcome.

Cross Country is not only an individual sport where the winners are recognized but also a team sport much like relays are in Track and Field. While it is great to be the winning individual it is even better to be part of the winning team and enjoy the victory with the teammates you do those long practice runs beside every day.

Placement relative to other teams is what determines the team score and the final outcome. In this sport, the lowest score wins - each competitor is awarded a point score corresponding to his overall finish order in the race. If a team places all five runners in positions 1-5 their score would be a perfect 15, this happens - but not often. Basically, scores are totaled for the first five members of each team and the winner results. In the case of a tie the scores of up to two additional team members can be used as a tiebreaker.

Competition begins in September and statewide runs to the middle of November. There are regional and national competitions that continue into December. Each year teams from the area attend many prestigious nationwide meets and do a great job representing their schools and Section II. This section is recognized as a Cross Country power in NY State, the region and the Nation.