

HOW TO ORGANIZE A CROSS COUNTRY RACE

1. Select a tentative date and start time(s).

Go to www.scausatf.org and www.raceplace.com and look at the dates of currently scheduled cross country and road races that will compete for participants. (If you reference race schedules from the previous season, established races usually occur on the same corresponding weekend year after year.) Pick a date that will have as few conflicts with your race as possible. Don't overlook Sundays.

2. Secure a site.

Public parks and large school grounds are your best bet for a cross country race site. If you don't have a specific site for your race in mind, this will require you to make some site inspections. The proximity to parking and rest room facilities should be considered in selecting a site. (The cost of renting Porta-Potties is about \$100 each.)

The application/approval process to secure your site may take several months, so START EARLY. A 9:00am morning start time is likely to improve your approval chances at public facilities that experience heavy use and multiple activities later in the day.

3. Apply for a USATF sanction.

Once you have a date and site, call the Southern California USATF office at **(562) 869-4574** and request a sanction application for your race. The cost of the sanction is based on the number of entrants you anticipate. (\$150 for 1-100 entrants, \$175 for 101-250, \$325 for 251-500, \$550 for 501-1000, and \$900 for 1001-2000 entrants.) A USATF sanction provides \$1 million of liability coverage for you, the race organizer. It also provides the same insurance coverage for third parties—the site or facility owner, a sponsor, or anyone else who might require it—at no additional charge.

4. Advertise and post your race date.

Once you receive your sanction, request that your race be added to the Southern California competition schedule posted at www.scaustf.org. Other websites on which you should consider having your race posted include www.raceplace.com and www.trackinfo.org. Determine your individual and team entry fees based on your expenses for the site and equipment rentals, sanction, and your budget for race materials and awards. Typically, it takes 3-years for a new race to build its participation base to the level where it operates at a profit. **Runners Image** has a flyer distribution service you might also want to consider. It charges \$65 per 1000 flyers distributed at races prior to yours, and \$6 per store, running club, or fitness center to post your flyers. (Their contact information is listed below with the Finish Lynx Timing Services.)

5. Secure a timing/scoring service.

This should occur as soon as you receive your USATF sanction. You can time and score your race by hand of course, but if you are expecting a large field of competitors you should consider contracting with a Finish Lynx Service to time and score your meet. Some Finish Lynx Services also have mailing label databases for mailing race information and websites that will post your meet information on their event calendars, process your entries, and post your pre-meet entries and results.

Recommended Southern California Finish Lynx Timing Services include (in alphabetical order):

Finish Line International, Huntington Beach, contact finishline@nealand.com 714-841-5417

Flash Results West, Corona: contact Don Chadez at Dchadez@aol.com (714) 777-0314

Mobarik Haneef, Laguna Beach: contact coachmob@aol.com (949) 305-5945

Phototiming.com, San Luis Obispo: contact Doug Lynch at cdlynch@charter.net (805) 781-3790

Prime Time Race Timing, Twin Peaks: contact Caren Ware at caren.ware@gte.net 909-337-3509

Race Central, Rialto: contact Dennis or Judy Ikenberry at info@rccal.com 909-874-5870

Ron Hill, Walnut: contact Ronald@mypertech.com (626) 810-5560

Royal Results, Simi Valley: contact Erik Pedersen at erikpedersen@adelphia.net (805) 581-3740

Runners Image, Irvine: contact runimage@aol.com 949-552-6484

Time Management, Corona: contact timemanagement@netzero.net 760-602-1011

6. Develop a course.

If your race site does not have a permanent cross country course, you will need to develop one. At the open level, men's courses traditionally measure from 5 Kilometers (3.1 miles) to 10K (6.2 miles) and women's courses from 3K (1.875 miles) to 6K (3.75 miles). Even if there is a traditional course at your site, you may want to design a new course to create better start/finish logistics or to take full advantage of the site's space and terrain.

Course Design Recommendations:

- **A cross country course should be challenging, but safe.** Avoid laying out a course where drinking water and bathrooms are unavailable (or be prepared to import them) and where emergency vehicle access is difficult. Avoid using trails or paths that are narrow or rutted, littered with rocks or holes, or adjacent to hazards such as low-hanging tree branches or barbed wire fencing. No portion of the course should be too narrow to accommodate at least 3 competitors running side by side. Narrow bridges and fence openings, steep down-hills, and crossing roads or streets that are open to vehicle traffic should also be avoided.
- **Consider spectator viewing when designing your course.** Don't be afraid to use multiple loops or hourglass and outer-inner loop configurations that repeatedly bring the course back to a central viewing area. Courses with multiple loops should be constructed so that runners will not be likely to lap each other or collide at intersections.
- **Ideally, a cross country course should offer varied terrain that challenges the skills of a runner. It should not, however, be an obstacle course or a mountain run.** In areas without hills, you can integrate multiple turns, switchbacks, chicanes, and different surfaces (e.g., grass to dirt to pavement) into the course to create variety and pace changes.
- **Every course should have a long, wide starting area and finishing straight.** At the start, the course should not narrow, turn, or ascend a hill for at least 150 meters. The start and finish should be located relatively close to one another.
- **For accuracy, measure the course with a calibrated measuring wheel, not with an automobile or bicycle odometer.** It is not important, however, that the course measure precisely 3K, 5K, 6K, 8K, or 10K in distance. What is important is that everyone in a given race runs the same course.
- **If you have a multiple loop course, a new course, or course markings short of a white line from start to finish, it is highly recommended that you have a cyclist on a mountain bike serve as a lead vehicle for the front-runners to follow in each race, start-to-finish.**

6. Recruit Volunteers.

It takes a small army to conduct a cross country race. You will need assistants to help mark the course before the race and to collect those materials afterwards. You will need people to check-in runners before the race who have pre-registered, to register those who have not, and to collect entry fees. You will need a Starter, who will also serve as Referee. The starter does not need to be a USATF-certified official, but it is recommended. As Race Director, it is not recommended that you fulfill the role of starter/referee yourself. Whoever does serve as starter needs to know USATF cross country rules and how to adjudicate protests and make disqualifications. It is highly recommended that you have a sound system (even if its just a powerful, portable megaphone) and a Race Announcer to advise spectators of the progress of each race, announce the leading individual runners and teams at various stages, identify finishers as they cross the finish line, announce results, and make awards presentations. You will need Inspectors around the course to observe the conduct of competitors during the race, direct them to follow the correct course at confusing points, and ensure runners go around the flags or cones placed at each turn. Inspectors report any infraction to the Referee, who then makes rulings on disqualification. You will need Split Timers to call off all runners' times at the mile marks along the course. You will need Spotters with walkie-talkies to relay the front-runners' race numbers to the announcer at various stages of the race. You will need a Finish Judge to determine the correct order of finish at the finish line. For most meets, this can be the Starter/Referee. The Finish Judge stands at one end of the finish line and judges the order of close finishes. His or her decision is final. The best way for the Finish Judge to convey this information to the Chute Monitors (positioned at the neck of the chute to place finishers in the correct order and

assure no switching of positions takes place) is to call jersey colors in the order of finish (for instance, "Red-Blue"). You will need a Tag Stewart positioned at the end of the chute to tear-off the name tag at the bottom of each runner's race number and place it on a spindle (which looks like a large safety pin) in the order of finish. You will also need a Race Number Recorder to provide a backup order of finish list. You should also have Medical Personnel on hand to deal with injuries or a medical emergency. That can be an attending physician, athletic trainer, or certified EMS professional. If you are not using a Finish Lynx Timing System, you will also need Timers with print-timer watches, Place Recorders, and Scorers. And finally, you will need help to pick up trash after the race if you want to avoid being charged a clean-up fee.

7. Race Materials Checklist: Prior to your race, you will need to produce, purchase, rent, or borrow all of the following materials...

- Volunteers Assignment Sheet.
- Race Packets: which should include information sheet, course map, race number (and 4 safety pins to attach it), for each individual runner or the members of each team entered. You will need to prepare additional packets for runners who register the day of the race.
- List of pre-registered teams and runners for your registration desk and announcer.
- Pens and extra race numbers for the registration desk.
- Note pads & pens for Inspectors to record the race numbers of runners who commit infractions during the race.
- Cash box with receipts and adequate change.
- Table & chairs for your Registration and Timing/Scoring Areas.
- Table for water jugs at the end of the finish chute.
- Table Signage and scotch tape.
- Announcer's Packet: Race schedule, entry lists with race numbers, and course records.
- Megaphone or sound system.
- Walkie-Talkies: for spotters to relay the front-runners' race numbers at points around the course to the announcer.
- Stopwatches: for the split-callers at the mile marks.
- Starting pistol & blanks or an air horn.
- Spindles: for threading race number nametags.
- Water jugs, cups, and a trash can at the end of the finish chute.
- Flag posts with colored flags and/or arrowed-signs or cones to mark the turns.
- Stakes for the finish chute and rope or line pennants to string between them.
- Sledge hammers to sink the chute stakes.
- Chalker or spray paint striper to mark the start and finish lines and course intersections.
- Awards

8. Mark the course.

Your first responsibility as Race Director is to provide a safe, well-marked course for your participating runners. Once you've laid out and measured your course, the next step is to mark it properly. You can purchase course-marking materials from a number of different manufacturers or wholesalers, or perhaps you can borrow those materials from a nearby college or high school cross country team. Those materials include 5' long steel directional flag posts with colored flags, 4' long chute posts, colored line pennants, and nylon rope. (Old golf bags are perfect for storing flag posts & chute stakes and moving them around the course.)

You may not be aware that there are international rules and requirements for marking a cross country course. The basic rules are:

- A 12-inch colored flag 4-feet above the ground must always be in view on the course: BLUE flag= Straight ahead, YELLOW flag= Right turn, and RED flag= Left turn.
- There can be no ground obstructions that can trip or injure a runner.
- Turns and intersections must be marked with materials that won't harm the eyes or skin.
- The starting line should be wide enough to accommodate at least 3-runners from each team on the front line. The distance from either end of the starting line to the first turn or narrowing point of the course should be the same.

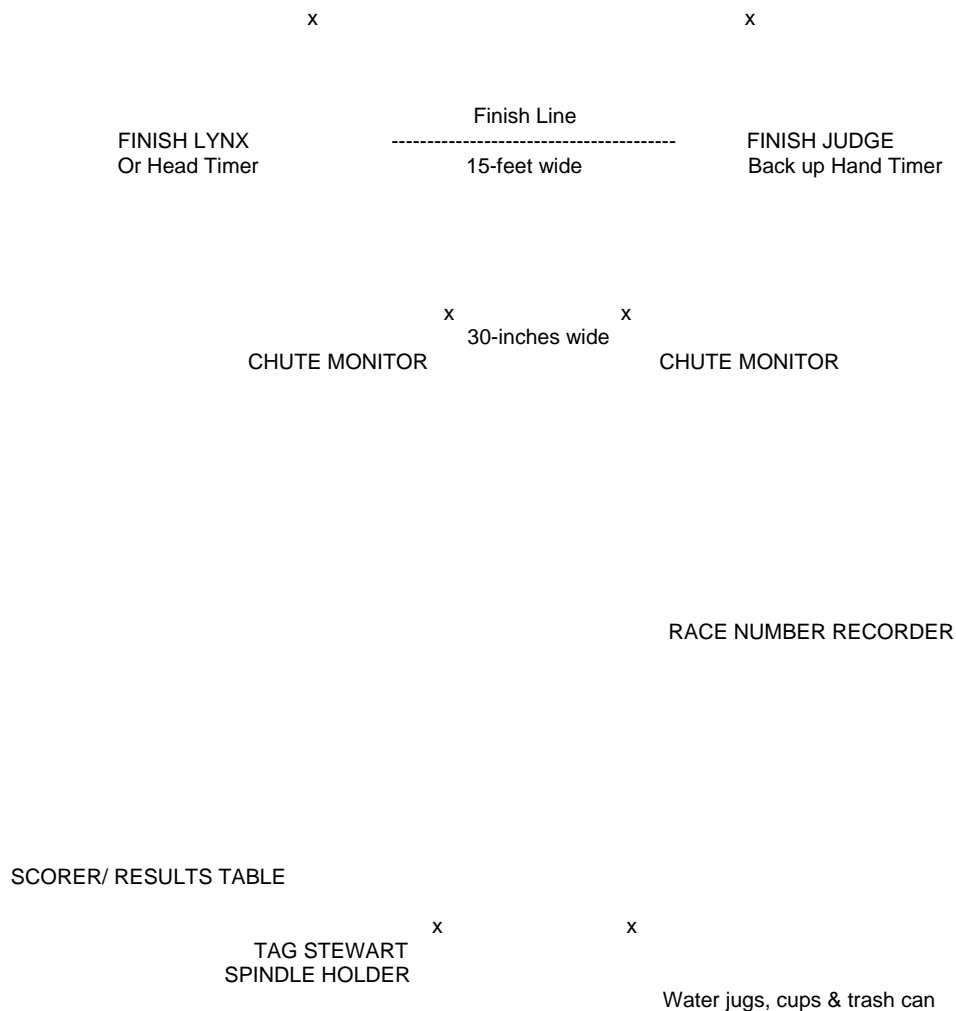
- The finish chute should be a funnel at least 15-feet wide at the finish line, which narrows to 30-inches 30-45 feet past the finish line.

Chalk (*powdered granite*) or biodegradable **water-base paint** that will not harm grass can also be used to help mark a cross country course. While marking the course with a solid white line start-to-finish is ideal, the areas most in need of marking are turns and intersections. The marking should begin with the existing direction of travel and clearly extend into the new direction. On a long, uninterrupted route, occasional chalk or paint lines or arrows will assure the front-runners they are on the right path. Chalk should never replace accurate flagging, however. The rules state that in a discrepancy over the markings on a cross country course, the directional flags take precedence. (As a consequence, it should go without saying that an Inspector should be placed at every turn and intersection on the course to direct runners.) If your race site will not accommodate or permit flags driven into the ground or chalk or paint lines, **arrowed sandwich board signs** or **cones** should be used. To mark areas where the course crosses pavement, use **surveyor's tape**.

9. Set up the Finish Chute.

After providing a safe, well-marked course, your next priority as Race Director is providing a finish line chute that accurately records the place and time of each finisher.

The following diagram is recommended for setting up your finish chute:



NOTE: The chute should narrow to 30-inches wide 30-45 feet past the finish line. The greater the number of entrants in the race, the longer the chute will need to be, as you want to avoid having the chute back-up in front of the finish line at all costs.