

# MERCER ISLAND HIGH SCHOOL



## CROSS COUNTRY TEAM HANDBOOK

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Welcome	3
Practice times/ locations, meet schedule and key dates	4
Communication	4
What is Cross Country?	5
Team Expectations and PE Requirements	6-7
Nutrition	8-9
Goal Setting	10
Shoes, apparel, uniforms and accessories	11
MIXC Records, Top Times and State finishes	12
Resources (PT, Registered Dietitians, shoes)	13

## WELCOME

If this is your first introduction to the MIXC family, welcome! If you are a returning runner or family member, welcome back!

MIXC is a community of student-athletes. We are a team comprised of girls and guys, fast and not as fast runners, school leaders, band members, drama students, and multi-sport athletes. It is a no-cut sport and everyone is welcome as long as they give their very best. Being the fastest can be fun, but the least fast person is also a critical member of our team, as is everyone in between.

Runners typically share several traits. We like to run, obviously, but on a deeper level there are common experiences that bind us together. For some, these come naturally, for others we try teach them. They include:

- Pushing our boundaries and getting comfortable being uncomfortable
- Setting goals and pursuing them vigorously
- Embracing the process and enjoying the journey
- Celebrating PRs and accepting delayed gratification
- Cheering others' successes and offering encouragement during challenging times
- Persevering through tough days, workouts, races
- Understanding the importance of consistency

On a daily basis, we will strive to be the best version of ourselves and to control what we can – our effort and attitude.

As a coaching staff, our overriding goals are to foster a lifelong love of running, hone the above characteristics, and assist with developing lasting memories and relationships. A great deal of our satisfaction comes from sharing in both individual accomplishments and team successes and the long term relationships we see develop.

MIXC has been on an upward trajectory for several years, culminating last season with the boys' team winning KingCo and placing 9<sup>th</sup> at State. The girls team also had a breakout year, making it to District and advancing 2 individuals to State. And our JV team dominated at Sub Varsity KingCo. We plan to build on that momentum and have another fantastic season. Stay healthy, be well, and let's go MIXC!

With an abundance of excitement,

Susan Empey, Eric Goldhammer, and Gavin Cree

## PRACTICE TIMES/ MEETS/ KEY DATES

Once the school year starts, August 31:

Monday – Friday 3:15 – 5:15 @ MIHS, JV Football field

Saturday – 9:00 – 10:30 @ various locations. Announced on the Band app.

Wednesday mornings – sporadic 30 minute easy shake-out runs. Purely optional.

Date	Team	Location	Time
Thur, Sept 1	KingCo XC Class Race	Marymoor	4:00
Thur, Sept 8	LW, Liberty, Juanita, MI	@ LW	4:00
Sat, Sept 10	Bellarmino Invite	Bellarmino HS	9:20
Thur, Sept 15	Bellevue, LW and MI	@ MI	4:00
Sat, Sept 24	Nike Invitational	Blue Lake Regional Park, PDX	TBD
Wed, Sept 28	Interlake, MI	@ Interlake	4:00
Sat, Oct 1	Twilight Invite	Cedarcrest Golf Course	1:30
Wed, Oct 6	6-way 2A/3A meet	@ Hazen	4:00
Wed, Oct 12	Hazen, Liberty, MI	@ MI	4:00
<i>Wed, Oct 19</i>	<i>SubVarsity Invite</i>	<i>@ TBD</i>	
Sat, Oct 22	KingCo Champs	@ Marymoor	11:30/ 12:00
Thur, Oct 27	Sea-King District Champs	@ Lower Woodland Park	TBD
Sat, Nov 5	State	@ Pasco	

## COMMUNICATION

We use a variety of ways to communicate, and all serve an important role:

1. The most time sensitive updates to practices and other announcements will be published on the [Band App](#). It includes a chat function, the preferred way to reach Coach Empey, and can also be used for athletes to talk with each other. First download the app, second request to join MIXC:
2. MIXC Newsletter. Depending on the time of year, this is sent weekly, monthly, or quarterly. To receive, email [mixcinfo@gmail.com](mailto:mixcinfo@gmail.com) to be added to the distribution list.
3. Strava ([www.strava.com](http://www.strava.com)). Athletes are highly encouraged to log and record their activities here, technically a social media site for athletes, but a really effective way to see individual progress and encourage teammates to strive to hit their weekly goals too. Once you join, request to join MIXC. Real names required.
4. Athletic.net lists all meets AND provides a record of athletes' race times:  
<https://www.athletic.net/CrossCountry/School.aspx?SchoolID=410>
5. Email: [susan.empey@mercerislandschools.org](mailto:susan.empey@mercerislandschools.org)

## WHAT IS CROSS COUNTRY

1

### CROSS COUNTRY IS A TEAM SPORT

The places of each team's top five finishers are added together for a team score. Each athlete's point total is arrived at by simply counting their place. For example, if an athlete finishes in 8th place in a race he/she scores eight points for their team. The team with the lowest score wins the race. Although only five runners score for a given team, on the varsity level seven runners may compete. The sixth and seventh runners serve not only as insurance but may also add to the score of opposing teams by finishing ahead, or displacing, those teams' scoring athletes.

Because five to seven athletes score in cross country, the team dynamic plays a crucial role in the success of the team. A team with two or three outstanding runners can be beaten by a team with five good runners. Each team is only as good as its weakest link. With this in mind it becomes imperative to foster the team dynamic in practice and in meets. Athletes must learn to work together and constantly encourage each other to race, practice, and conduct themselves to the best of their abilities. Additionally, team members must realize that they represent not just themselves, but all of their teammates, their coaches, and MIHS.

### CROSS COUNTRY IS AN INDIVIDUAL SPORT

Despite the importance of the team, cross country is often times very individual. Although others may encourage you in races and practices, ultimately it is only you who will do the work – and succeed, or give up – and fail. There are no time outs or substitutions in cross country; that is one of its beauties. Individually you will make tremendous leaps. There will, of course, be physical gains, but the more important benefits will be on the mental side. Cross country will teach you the value of hard work and patience. It will develop your mental toughness.

Nobody sits on the bench in cross country. If you are healthy and have attended practice regularly you will compete in meets. It makes no difference if you are the fastest athlete or the fiftieth fastest; you will compete.

### CROSS COUNTRY IS A PURE SPORT

Cross country is not a game. Cross country does not need a ball. Cross country does not need a myriad of convoluted rules to become interesting. It is pure and simple. The first person across the finish line wins. They score one point. There are no field goals or extra points. There are no infield fly rules. Run fast to win. That's it.

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<sup>1</sup> These descriptions and several items that follow, borrowed from the Central Catholic Cross Country handbook

## TEAM EXPECTATIONS AND PE REQUIREMENTS

Beginning August 22 we have practice 6 days a week, and while Saturday is not mandatory, it is highly encouraged. 3:15 start time during the week, 9:00 am start on Saturday. Consistency is critical to building fitness, fostering camaraderie, minimizing injury risk, and achieving team success.

### PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS:

- In order to earn PE credit you must meet JV standards:
  - 85% of all M-F practices (38 of 45 weekday practices) between August 22 – October 21. Practice counts as being there for the entirety, unless excused by a coach, and participating to the best of your ability. Attending a Saturday morning practice will be counted towards your total. **Please note: credits for practices begin when the season begins. If you start the season late, you still need to attend the min. number of practices.**
  - Participation in all 4 regular season meets (or 3-4 regular season meets and 1-2 invitationals) plus your season end meet (SubVarsity or Varsity KingCo).
  - Participating to the “best of your ability” means running \* even if very slowly \* with no walking after the first two weeks. This also includes giving drills, stretching and core your focused effort.
- To be a team member, even if not striving for JV status or PE credit, regular attendance is still required. Each Friday starting September 16 (end of week 4), athletes who have attended fewer than 75% of M-F practices/meets since the first day of school (August 31) will be removed from the roster. We hope to welcome these athletes back in future seasons when their schedules allow greater commitment and consistency.
- Be respectful to teammates, coaches, captains and fellow competitors. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Listening to coaches/ captains/ teammates when they have the floor
  - No inappropriate language
  - No disruptive behavior, especially during drills, core and ice breakers.Two warnings will be issued, along with 25 pushups per warning. The 3<sup>rd</sup> violation will result in you leaving practice and credit for practice being removed.
- Student-Athletes are required to follow the School Athletic Code and are subject to all disciplinary measures described within.
- Please communicate absences in writing to Coach Empey @ [susan.empey@mercerislandschools.org](mailto:susan.empey@mercerislandschools.org) or on the Band App.
- Follow the rules of the road<sup>2</sup>, be good MIHS representatives, and always try to run with a buddy.

### MEETS:

- To participate in a meet students must have attended 10 practices (8 practices before a jamboree) and attend at least 60% (4) of their classes that day.
- Warm-up and cool-down WITH THE TEAM.

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<sup>2</sup> Rules of the road include running on sidewalks/ paths whenever available and always using crosswalks, making sure to make eye contact with drivers before crossing. If you become injured on a run, please return to the school and have a teammate seek help if necessary.

- At meets when your race is completed you are expected to be cheering on your teammates and/or cooling down.

**VARSIITY LETTERS:**

- To earn a Varsity letter the below are critical factors that will be considered:
  - Qualifying for the KingCo meet. 7 will compete with 2 alternates selected.
  - Top-3 overall in the Sub Varsity meet
  - Seniors with >=3 years of participation and who attend 90% of all M – Sat practices/meets
  - Logging runs on Strava or submitting to a coach another form of a weekly log
  - Team leadership and offseason preparation
  - Coach discretion

<u>Excused Absences</u>	<u>Unexcused Absences</u>
Illness	Drivers Ed
Family emergencies	Too much homework
Religious holidays	Private tutoring
Make-up exams, meeting with teachers, MIHS tutors	Work
Injuries, when cleared by a coach	Club activities
Doctors appointments	Band - level assessments, sectionals, private instruction
College visits	Failure to complete daily health attestation on time

## NUTRITION

Nutrition plays a fundamental role for all long distance runners. High school athletes need to ensure they are consuming enough to support their increased energy demands during the season and throughout their lives.

**Food is not only the fuel that propels us; it keeps us alive!** It is essential for all organs including the brain, heart, and lungs. Plus, the nutrients we consume also aid/accelerate the recovery process, help prevent injuries, and contribute to general health and well-being. *If you find yourself with persistent injuries, with changes to your sleep or mood, or with changes to or interruptions of your menstrual cycle, consider whether not eating enough could be a contributing factor, and **talk with your coach**.* We will discuss nutrition throughout the season but below are some high level things to keep in mind always.

All teen athletes should consume **\*at least\*** BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER, AND 2-4 snacks daily to optimize energy levels and health. **If you are hungry, eat!** Be aware that exercise can blunt or alter traditional hunger cues. For example, rather than your stomach grumbling, you may feel a headache or mood changes.

There are **three critical macronutrients** for athletes: carbohydrates (“carbs”), proteins, and fats. Ideally, all three are included in each of your meals/snacks. Generally speaking, though, **it is most important to eat enough/plenty**, even if what you eat does not balance all three macronutrients.

**Carbs** (such as sugars and starches) are the primary energy source for all biological processes. Carbs fuel muscles, brain function, recovery, muscle building, and the transport of other essential nutrients in the body. Carbs also protect against fatigue. Most of an athlete's energy comes from carbs.

**Proteins** are essential to muscle growth and repair, as well as other biological processes such as hormonal signaling. When dietary protein is insufficient, muscle may be broken down to provide essential proteins for survival. Although meat generally provides "complete protein" (all necessary amino acids), not all protein sources provide all necessary amino acids, so diversity of protein sources is valuable. Vegetarians and vegans need to pay special attention and make extra effort to consume enough protein.

**Fats** are essential to many biological processes as well, especially all neurological function (brains and the nerves that control muscles). Fats are necessary for many vitamins and minerals (and carbs and proteins) to be absorbed and are critical to healthy hormonal function. Fats also provide fuel to supplement carbs, help build muscle, and aid in recovery.

**Iron** is essential in building red blood cells and transporting oxygen through our blood to our muscles. The impact of running accelerates the breakdown of red blood cells, so athletes' bodies are always demanding iron. Athletes who menstruate should especially emphasize iron as it is lost during menstruation. Vegetarians also need to make extra effort to consume iron, as red meat is a primary source of it. Cooking food in cast iron cookware may increase iron consumption. And if you take iron

supplements (with approval from a doctor), combining it with citrus juice can aid absorption AND do not take it within 30 min of any calcium intake, as calcium blocks absorption.

**Micronutrients** include vitamins and minerals, which are essential for general health and well-being as well as some processes relevant to athletics such as energy processing and recovery. A varied and diverse diet often supplies all necessary micronutrients. Vegetarians and vegans may need to make extra effort to gain some nutrients often obtained through meat, such as iron and B vitamins. Athletes should salt foods freely unless instructed otherwise for specific medical reasons. Nutrients from supplement pills are generally less easily absorbed than nutrients from food, and multivitamins often are ineffective.

**HYDRATION** – Water is wonderful. Yes, it quenches thirst, but is important even when you don't "feel" thirsty. It improves muscle function (reduce chances of muscle strains) and circulation (blood delivers oxygen and nutrients to muscles). Aim to have a glass of water when you wake up (replaces water lost overnight, avoiding chronic dehydration), before a meal (aids digestion), and 30 min before a run, as well as any time you are thirsty.

**TIMING** – Timing plays an important role in fueling and recovery. Every person responds differently, and documenting what works best for you is recommended. A rule of thumb is for a meal to be 3-4 hours before you run and top off energy stores with an easily digestible high-carb snack 30 minutes before you start. Some can eat full meals closer to exercise without issue. ***Experiment to find what works for you.***

An easily digestible snack high in carbs and protein **within 30 minutes of finishing a workout** accelerates recovery. Cells are more receptive to absorbing nutrients during this "golden window" right after exercise. Muscle breakdown is greater and recovery slower without this post-exercise snack. The sooner you can eat after exercising, the better, as long as your stomach and appetite are receptive (female bodies generally have a shorter "golden window" than male bodies, so rapid refueling is an even greater priority for biologically female athletes). Fats are also valuable for recovery, but may be more difficult to digest shortly after exercise for many athletes. ***Experiment to find what works for you.***

Nutrition does not need to be a mechanical obligation. Food often holds cultural and emotional meaning and can be pleasurable and satisfying. So enjoy your meals, knowing you are treating your body well.

**RESOURCES and INFORMATION** – when it comes to nutrition, the world is full of misleading or harmful information or information not relevant to teens. It is important to filter what you see, hear, and read. Working with a sports-specific anti-diet registered dietician can be very helpful, but some sources of advice can be actively harmful even if well-intentioned if they are under-informed or operating on outdated ideas that have been refuted by more recent research. **Talk openly with your coach with any concerns that you have and for guidance to the best resources available.**

## GOAL SETTING

Goals provide purpose and direction and provide a standard for measuring progress. To excel at anything, not just athletics, goals are critical. The process of setting goals and pursuing them can actually be more important than the end product.

Evidence suggests the mere act of taking time to thoughtfully set goals just might be the most effective performance enhancing strategy in sport. The training you do throughout the season sets the foundation for success, but effective goal setting is critical to reaching your potential.

### Types of Effective Goals

*Performance/ Outcome Goals:* Performance goals address overall performance, such as running faster, farther, or both. These types of goals are primarily under your own control and not dependent on others. Outcome goals are competitive goals that involve competition with others and are not necessarily under our control. Winning a KingCo title, making it to State, or finishing in the top 10 at a race are examples. These types of goals are often dependent on factors out of your control: your competition, weather, terrain, illness, luck.

*Process Goals:* Goals that focus on doing the right thing, regardless of the outcome, knowing those activities are leading you in the right direction. Focus on things like improving your consistency, strength, nutrition plan, running form and attitude. These are goals over which you have complete control.

### Guidelines for Setting Effective Goals

1. Spend time reflecting on your past seasons or athletic experiences. What went well, what could have gone better, favorite moments, growth opportunities etc. But do not limit yourself by your past.
2. Set performance/ outcome goals, but *prioritize and focus on the **process goals***. Know your “why” and let your coaches help with the “how”.
3. Successful goals tend to be **S.M.A.R.T.**
  - They're **specific** and **measurable** rather than general or “do-your-best” goals.
  - Set moderately difficult goals that are challenging but **attainable** and **realistic**.
  - Set goals that are **trackable**. Seeing your progress whether it be in a journal, a spreadsheet, Strava can help you stay focused.
4. Set short-term (6 weeks), intermediate (end of season), and long-term goals (end of high school). Write them down and place them where you will see consistently. I like having 2 goals for each time period, but 3-5 process goals that will help you reach them.

Two final things....

*Flexibility is important. Goals may need to be raised or lowered depending on circumstances out of your control (Covid!). Unrealistic goals may reduce your motivation to pursue them, and sometimes things happen that require you to make an adjustment.*

*Practice patience. Achieving goals is hard and requires time and commitment. Long-term progression inevitably will include periods of boredom, and patience is a SKILL to be developed. And be mentally prepared for discomfort. It's all a part of the process.*

### SHOES

One of the great things about cross country is the lack of need for a lot of equipment. The bare necessities are a pair of running shoes - but good ones are critical. If you are new to cross country or are someone that deals with unhappy feet, I highly recommend visiting a local RUNNING store (not big box athletic store) and have a trained expert watch how you run and make recommendations accordingly. Once you have a shoe that works for YOU, they are easy to replace anywhere, but finding the right shoe is important. Do not simply buy the most or least expensive shoe, or the prettiest/coolest looking. A very good shoe might cost a bit more, but it will most likely last longer and help with injury prevention.

One pair of good shoes is good; two pair are, alternated daily, are even better.

Many runners also own spikes or racing flats for workouts and races. Speak with a coach before purchasing to see whether it is appropriate.

And please remember that cross country shoes are designed for cross country, not for P.E., basketball, street shoes, etc... They will last far longer if treated appropriately. They have been designed to support and to do a specific job. If they are worn for other activities or everyday use they will simply not last as long, and they will not do their job. When shoes need washing do it by hand in the shower or sink, not in the machine. To dry, stuff with newspaper and allow to dry at room temperature.

### APPAREL/ EQUIPMENT

Lots of different types of running apparel is available and below is a list of items good to have on hand. Especially in the NW, layering is key. For warm-ups and cool-downs please have sweats/ extra gear to wear before and after workouts:

- Sweatpants (tapered "running" pants are preferred)
- Tights (both full length and "half" tights)
- Sports bra
- Rain jacket
- Stocking cap & gloves
- Sweatshirts
- Extra t-shirts (long and short sleeve) and extra socks
- Running watch – GPS enabled is great, but not required. At minimum some timing device is helpful and ideally doesn't involve needing to run with a phone.
- Reflective arm bands, head lamp

### UNIFORMS

MIXC singlets and light weight jackets are distributed before the first meet of the season. It is athlete's responsibility to **supply your own black shorts**. Black sweatpants are also encouraged. Singlets and jackets are to be returned at the end of the season. Sparkling clean.

## MIXC TOP TIMES AND STATE FINISHES

### Top 10 Times (5K)

Aaron Elefson	15:42.9	2010		Katia Matora	18:20.4	2011
Brian Govier	15:51.0	2003		Lindsay Benster	18:30.9	2009
Dylan Lesko	15:54.4	2014		Maggie Baker	18:31.9	2017
Evan Sadler	15:59.1	2008		Nicole Kelleher	19:10.0	1999
Brandon Fellows	16:00.0	2004		Phoebe Merritt	19:13.3	2008
Daniel Mayer	16:07.8	2012		Cecilia Rosenman	19:18.1	2014
Matt Wotepka	16:08.4	2012		Kayla Lee	19:26.7	2016
Tyler Benster	16:09.3	2008		Chloe Michaels	19:26.9	2016
Nicholas Ford	16:10.0	2010		Alida Scalzo	19:28.0	2012
Ryan Koopman	16:13.9	2021		Molly O'Callahan	19:33.3	2009

### Freshmen and Sophomores Top-5

Aaron Elefson	16:23	10th		Katia Matora	18:20	9th
Kai Zettel	16:46	10th		Lindsay Benster	18:30	10th
Tyler Benster	16:47	10th		Chloe Michaels	19:31	10th
Brian Govier	16:48	10th		Alexa Bauman	19:34	9th
Owen Powell	16:51	9th		Mary Rose Vu	19:40	10th

### Juniors and Seniors Top-5

Aaron Elefson	15:43	12th		Maggie Baker	18:31	11th
Brian Govier	15:51	12th		Nicole Kelleher	19:10	12th
Dylan Lesko	15:54	12th		Phoebe Merritt	19:13	12th
Evan Sadler	15:59	12th		Cece Rosenbaum	19:18	11th
Brandon Fellows	16:00	12th		Kayla Lee	19:26	11th

### Top-10 Team State Finishes (>2000)

BOYS		GIRLS		
2021 – 9th		2015 – 9 <sup>th</sup>	2007 – 7 <sup>th</sup>	2000 – 6 <sup>th</sup>
2014 – 6 <sup>th</sup>		2014 – 8 <sup>th</sup>	2006 – 5 <sup>th</sup>	
2008 – 5 <sup>th</sup>		2012 – 10 <sup>th</sup>	2003 – 4 <sup>th</sup>	
2004 – 7 <sup>th</sup>		2011 – 7 <sup>th</sup>	2002 – 4 <sup>th</sup>	
<b>1983 – 1<sup>st</sup></b>		<b>2008 – 1<sup>st</sup></b>	2001 – 4 <sup>th</sup>	

### KingCo Champions

BOYS			GIRLS	
2021			2011	
2008			2010	
2004			2008	

## RESOURCES

### Running Specialty Stores

Super Jock N' Jill

Redmond - 16095 Cleveland St (425) 658-4929

Greenlake – 7210 East Green Lake Dr. N (206) 522 – 7711

Road Runner

Bellevue - 12200 Northup Way (425) 406-6730

### Physical & Massage Therapists

G4 Athlete 2737 77th Ave SE, STE 214, Mercer Island 206-518-9405

Helix Sport & Spine - (206) 946-1192 2630 77th Ave SE #102 Mercer Island, WA

Eastside Sports Clinic 1400 SE 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 105, Bellevue

Michael Yamashita [myamashita@esrckirkland.com](mailto:myamashita@esrckirkland.com)

### Cross Training Athletic Facilities

Mercer Island Athletic Club (MIAC) 77 Central Building

7785 Sunset Highway Suite 118 (206) 453-3731

### Registered Dietitians\*

- Maria Dalzot (world class trail runner and excellent RD): <https://www.mariadalzotrd.com/>
- Heidi Strickler (specializes in working with endurance athletes): <https://gritlink.net/provider/heidi-strickler>
- Wendy Sterling (works with athletes with eating disorders): <http://sterlingnutrition.com/>
- Various RDs trained in IE/HAES (intuitive eating, health at every size) who specialize in athletes and/or eating disorders: [https://www.one-tab.com/page/44qe6MbcS7Sw\\_ombhUTc6w](https://www.one-tab.com/page/44qe6MbcS7Sw_ombhUTc6w)
- RD to recommend athletes follow on Instagram:
  - Megan Medrano: <https://www.instagram.com/meganmedrano.rd/>
  - Taylor Chan: <https://www.instagram.com/foodandfearless/>

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\* A Registered Dietitian is accredited by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, has completed an undergraduate program in nutrition and also a one year clinical internship program. They must also pass a national exam and maintain their certifications. Nutritionists may have an undergraduate degree in Nutrition but do not have the same rigorous standards RDs do. Please check credentials when seeking advice.