

Readington Runs – Cross-Country

The Fall Readington Middle School cross-country season is underway, with practices starting in late August. Readington teacher Janet Howard has again returned as Head Coach, with assistance from colleague Mary Padavano and Readington resident Bruce Marshall. The word must have gotten out on last season's success – competitiveness, camaraderie, and fun – as there are 63 members on this year's team, with equal representation from grades 6, 7, and 8. There are no cuts in middle school cross-country, with an emphasis on participation and development. The RMS runners are keen and their improvement since the beginning of practices is remarkable. They are learning about teamwork and the fun of competing, and in the process becoming disciplined athletes.

As per Wikipedia, cross-country running originated in England during the early part of the 19th century and was introduced into the U.S. in 1878. At first, the sport served mainly as training for summer track and field. Nine years later, cross country running became a formal sport in the United States. Despite the international popularity of cross-country, the sport was dropped from the Olympics after 1924 due to it being an inappropriate summer sport, as it is commonly considered a Fall activity. In the 1960s, the International Amateur Athletic Union, which regulates cross-country running, allowed women to run for the first time.

Each cross-country running course is different in composition. Distances are generally standardized; however, there will be little in common between any two courses other than their distance. As such, accurate comparisons cannot be made between performances on different courses or even on the same course on different years as the weather and underfoot conditions can be significantly different. For this reason, records of the fastest times in international competition are not kept. For most of the middle school cross-country courses in Hunterdon County, distances are approximately 2 miles each.

All runners start en masse at the same time, and scoring is on a team basis, making it unique compared to track and field competitions. Points are awarded to the individual runners of eligible teams, equal to the position in which they cross the finish line (first place gets 1 point, second place gets 2 points, etc). Teams are considered ineligible to score if they have fewer than the meet's required number of scorers, which is typically five. Only these first five runners in for a team are counted towards that team's score. Teams are awarded ranks based on the number of points their top runners have, with lowest being best.

The lowest possible score in a five-to-score match is 15 (1+2+3+4+5), achieved by a team's runners finishing in each of the top five positions. If there is a single opposing team then they would have a score of 40 (6+7+8+9+10), which can be considered a "sweep" for the winning team. In some competitions a team's sixth and seventh runner are scored in the overall field and are known as "pushers" or "displacers" as their place can count ahead of other runners. In the above match, if there are two non-scoring runners and they came 6th and 7th overall, the opponent's score would be 50 (8+9+10+11+12). Accordingly, the official score of a forfeited dual meet is 15-50.

There's a total of 17 interscholastic meets on the Readington Middle School XC schedule, with most starting at 3:45 PM. Home meets are held behind Holland Brook School, and visiting teams in October include:

Fri Oct 3 – Alexandria
Mon Oct 13 – High Bridge
Mon Oct 20 – JP Case
Tues Oct 21 – Alexandria
Mon Oct 27 – Delaware Township

Parents and all Readington residents are encouraged to come out and support our local runners. You will be impressed by their enthusiasm, their team spirit, their dedication, and their desire.

For runners of all ages, October is prime racing season, as the weather is cooler, and many are doing tune-up races in preparation for Fall marathons. Some of the popular marathons in the northeast are the New York City Marathon (NY), Philadelphia Marathon (PA), Hartford Marathon (CT), and Steamtown (Scranton PA).

Here are some popular local October 2008 races:

Oct 4 – Solberg Airport Duathlon and 5K
Oct 5 – NJ Shore Half Marathon
Oct 12 – Tewksbury 5-Miler
Oct 12 – LBI 18-Mile Run
Oct 18 – Run for Kids' Sake 5K
Oct 26 – USATF NJ 8K XC Championship

For more information on the local running club – the Hill Runners of Hunterdon – check out their website <http://www.hrhnj.org/>. For information on running in general in Readington and Hunterdon County, please contact Bruce Marshall at BGMarshall@earthlink.net.

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