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CROSS-COUNTRY: THE SPORT

by

James W. Pilkington

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Coaches of all athletic events are constantly searching for new reading materials concerning their areas of interest. Cross-country running is not a new activity, but it is a newly activated form of competition in many schools across the nation. This old activity is rapidly growing in size and importance on the sports scene in America today.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem. The basic problem involved in this study is dual in nature. The solution sought includes: (1) determining the contribution of cross-country to the education of youth in the educational program of the secondary school and institutions of higher learning; and (2) determining the various practices, techniques, theories and organizational plans presently utilized by the leading cross-country coaches in the secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.

Importance of the Problem. Cross-country as a competitive inter-collegiate and interscholastic sport is gaining in popularity and implementation in the schools of America as rapidly as any activity. Coach Charles Winsor, cross-country coach at Wisconsin State College at Platteville, states:

...cross-country is one of the fastest growing sports in the school program. And no wonder. It requires little equipment and offers many boys the opportunity to acquire prestige and to build themselves up in a healthy, invigorating climate.¹

¹Winsor, Charles, "A Cross-country Program," Scholastic Coach, Volume 29, Number 10, (June 1960), 46-7.

This is not to say that cross-country running is a new activity as history makes several mentions of it from man's earliest years. C. W. Hackensmith reports:

In prehistoric and historic times survival undoubtedly was more dependent upon the ability to run than in recent centuries. And of course the best runners were especially useful as couriers and advance scouts in peace as well as in war. Races of varied distances were routine among all North American Indians...the Shoshone conducted races for both men and women.²

²Hackensmith, C. W., History of Physical Education. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 12.

Distance running in the Golden Age of the Greeks and of Olympiad is also given a place in historical reports:

Every Greek city that sponsored an athletic festival erected... a stadium...flanked by either a natural or artificial embankment. The long race, or the colichos consisted of twenty-four stades or slightly over two and one half miles.³

³Ibid., p. 52.

The grandfather of modern cross-country running is the famous Marathon Race. The gruelling event consists of 26 miles, 285 yards of running over natural terrain. The Marathon's origin is of historical significance to the study of cross-country running. C. W. Hackensmith notes:

Herodotus tells how Pheidippides ran from Athens to Sparta--150 miles--in two days. And it is Pheidippides' bringing news of victory from Marathon to Athens, a distance of 26 miles, 285 yards, that is commemorated in the modern marathon.⁴

⁴Ibid., p. 44.

The modern form of cross-country racing with its highly competitive basis must be credited to the resourceful English for its rebirth. Don Canham in his text, Cross-country Techniques Illustrated, traces briefly this movement:

It is interesting to note that in England the first teams were fielded by the colleges...athletic clubs took over and pushed the sport to its current European popularity. In America...the clubs such as the Westchester Hares and Hounds...were running over the hills in the 1870s.

It remained for Harvard University...in the 1880s to show an interest in cross-country. The first real intercollegiate cross-country race...was run between Pennsylvania and Cornell in 1890.

Now, virtually every college in the nation takes part in cross-country running and literally thousands of our high schools run in regular competition.⁵

⁵Canham, Don. Cross-country Techniques Illustrated (New York: Roland Press Co., 1953), pp. 7-8.

The fact is that "an old sport" is finding a new interest among the competitors, coaches, athletic directors and administrators of the American school system. Don Canham writes:

Cross-country running is here to stay and each fall more and more young men are experiencing the thrills and satisfaction of competing against their opponents, the terrain and very often, the elements.⁶

⁶Ibid., p. 8.

The problem involved in this research stems from two evident factors. One, an increased interest and use of cross-country running as a competitive intercollegiate and interscholastic sport in America. Two, a need for wider distribution of knowledge concerning the activity. The demand for information relative to the implementation, organization and administration of cross-country programs at all educational levels has surpassed the availability of instructional materials. This lack of information concerning the activity coupled with the rapid acceptance and utilization of the sport within the school systems of America has created a third phase of the problem by posing the question, "What is the relationship to, and the role of, cross-country as a competitive sport to the general program of education?"

To further expose the inadequacy of information concerning the sport of cross-country, the author offers a brief analysis of the materials written in form of books over the period of the past 35 years. The following writings represent samples of how cross-country has been covered:

- (1) Lloyd W. Olds. Track Athletics and Cross-country, 1931.

Mr. Olds, then coach and athletic director at Michigan State Normal College at Ypsilante, Michigan, developed a techniques text which devoted thirteen sparsely written pages of material to cross-country running.

- (2) Dean Cromwell. Championship Techniques in Track and Field, 1941.

Nearly a decade after the Olds publication, Dean Cromwell, then head coach of Track and Field at Southern California, presented a writing of 312 pages in which five pages concerning cross-country could be found. Two of these pages were completely filled by pictures.

- (3) G. W. Brenahan, et al. Track and Field Athletics. 1956.

In the fourth edition of their text the authors devoted seven of their 528 page volume to the sport of cross-country running. This writing is considered to be the track and field bible by many very successful high school and college coaches.

In the fifth and latest edition of Track and Field Athletics (1960), the authors included a total of ten pages on various phases of cross-country.

- (4) Richard Miller. Fundamentals of Track and Field. 1952.

In a text that was written a few years before the distance running revolution, Richard Miller, University of Illinois, devoted an entire chapter to the coaching of the fall distance sport. This chapter was complete in seven pages of the 271 page text.

- (5) Brother G. Luke. Coaching High School Track and Field. 1958.

A text written by the very successful coach of the West Philadelphia Catholic High School which allowed one sentence in commenting on the sport of cross-country. This was buried in a chapter written on distance running in spring track and field.

- (6) J. Mortensen, J. M. Cooper. Track and Field for Athlete and Coach. 1960.

The co-authors covered cross-country running and coaching techniques in two paragraphs in this writing.

- (7) Don Canham. Cross-country Techniques Illustrated. 1953.

This interesting ninety-six page text is devoted completely to cross-country techniques. At the time of writing, the material was up to date and vital. Since its first and only edition, we have experienced the world of the "sub-four minute milers" and records in longer distances races then believed unachievable. This writing is characterized by many illustrations and a minimum of factual materials.

A quote from the material antiquates the thinking of the times at the date of publishing:

This text was made possible through the contributions made by several individuals. The late E. C. Billy Hayes

(Indiana) will always be credited with giving America a new concept of distance running, and because of his great vision there is little new under the distance running sun.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 8.

Since this statement was made much new thinking has come to the front concerning distance training. The host of sub-four minute milers, the continual rewriting of long distance running records and the new world records in the half-mile, one mile and two mile runs makes the researcher realize that there is much new under the distance running sun. The "ultimate" distance race records have been quoted, broken and re-quoted by experts on the time-distance relationships. These records will continue to be set and broken and the basis will be better facilities, increased devotion on the part of the competitors and coaches and perhaps the most important of all, the search for and distribution of knowledge concerning the coaching of distance runners.

Each year in several of the periodicals in the area of athletics several fine articles are presented by leading coaches in cross-country. These articles are devoted to a given phase of the sport and do not cover the entire range of materials and information needed to initiate and operate a successful cross-country program. A sampling of the materials written include:

- (1) R. J. Langerman, "Cross-country Officiating and the Double-chute," Athletic Journal, XLIV (October, 1963), p. 22.

An article devoted to a new concept in officiating cross-country meets at the district, regional, state and national levels which includes races with as many as 400 competitors.

- (2) Robert Epskamp. "R_x for Distance Runners," Athletic Journal, XLII (March, 1963), p. 16.

A presentation that discusses various conditions that occur with distance runners, such as foot pain, staleness and posture problems.

- (3) D. F. Tavoracci. "Stimulating Interest in Cross-country," Athletic Journal, XL (September, 1959), pp. 52-3.

A general discussion of methods of developing interest in cross-country at the high school level. This article involves areas as public relations, attitude, interest and improvement.

Research at the graduate level has not opened the door to cross-country running and coaching knowledge. In Research Studies in Education 1953-64, only one study of 375 researches in the area of athletics involved cross-country. This study, The Effect of a Three, Four or Five Day a Week Cross-country Training Program on Circulo-respiratory Performances as Related to Some Physiological Factors was done by R. W. Lister in Boston. This was an experimental research and was involved only with a specific phase of the cross-country running program.

The importance and validation of this research, Cross-country: The Sport, is found in the proof of need for the publishing of up-to-date information concerning cross-country programs. Each season the author and other established cross-country coaches across the nation have numerous requests for such materials from schools initiating programs and from coaches lacking in backgrounds in cross-country training. No up-to-date material is available for reference to these requests.

The research techniques to be used in the study include the questionnaire, the personal interview and library research.

The questionnaire involved in the research is a seventy-one item

instrument concerning the areas of general organization; the cross-country course; the cross-country meet; awards, incentive and publicity; training procedures; equipment and supplies; diet and nutrition and the relationship of cross-country running to the program of general education.

The personal interview involves interviews with leading runners and coaches involved in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and the National Collegiate Athletic Association National Cross-country meets. These interviews were conducted personally at the sites of these two national competitions.

The library research will be the basis for the survey of literature. The source for this phase of the writing will be texts, periodicals, and special track and field publications.

Definition of Population. In setting the limits for a population to be investigated by the questionnaire, the author has chosen a group of coaches considered to be the leading coaches in the nation at the secondary school level in the states of Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri and Iowa.

The basis for the selection of the leading college and university cross-country coaches is the finish position of their teams in the National Collegiate Athletic Association large and small college national meets, and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics National Cross-country Meet. The coaches to be polled from the college-university section are:

- (1) The coaches of the first twenty teams to finish in the National Collegiate Athletic Association National Meet (small colleges).

- (2) The coaches of the first twenty teams to finish in the National Collegiate Athletic Association National Meet (major college-university).
- (3) The coaches of the first twenty teams to finish in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics National Meet.

The basis for the selection of the leading secondary school cross-country coaches is the finish of their teams in various classes of the state championships. The coaches to be polled from the secondary school section are:

- (1) State of Kansas. The coaches of the teams that finished in the top nine positions in each of three classes in the state championships (AA, A, and B).
- (2) State of Nebraska. The coaches of the teams that finished in the top nine positions in Class A state championships, twelve in Class B and C state championships.
- (3) State of Missouri. Missouri is a single class state championship. Coaches from the top fifteen teams will be polled.
- (4) State of Iowa. The coaches of the teams that finished in the top ten positions in each of the five classes in the state championships (AAAA, AAA, AA, A, and B).

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Aerobic Training. A method of training used to increase the efficiency of the oxygen utilization system. It involves runs of 800 meters or 880 yards at speeds that induce complete fatigue.

Anerobic Training. A method of training that involves bursts of speed that carry the runner to complete fatigue in twenty to thirty seconds of running. It is sometimes referred to as "sprint work" and is used to increase the efficiency of muscular contraction.

Body Weight Exercises. Exercises done using only one's body weight as resistance, such as pull-ups, push-ups with no external weight attached to the body.

Cross-country. The fall distance running sport. Distances vary from 1.5 to 6.0 miles depending upon the level of competition and age of competitors. The sport usually begins in September and terminates in November or early December in the United States.

Cross-country Team. A competitive group of three to five boys at the secondary level and from five to seven boys at the college-university level. High schoolers must finish a minimum of three runners to claim a team finish position and college-university runners must finish a minimum of five runners.

Distance Running. Most generally refers to races of distances from six miles up to the marathon distance. It refers to all forms of long distance racing in the fall and spring, including cross-country, road races and marathons.

Endurance Training. A program of running efforts over long distances which has as its goal the increase in the number of red corpuscles and the ability of the body to buffer more effectively the lactic acid residue of extreme physical activity. Another objective of endurance training is to prepare the body to postpone the onset of oxygen debt incurred by distance runners. Endurance training in weight lifting refers to schedules that include high number of repetitions per set and results

in a type of muscular development called definition development.

Fartlek. A Swedish term meaning "speed play". It is a period of continual running with untimed variation in pace, utilizing sprinting, jogging and intermediate speeds to cover irregular distances in the hills and on the running track. Basically it is an attempt to overcome the boredom of distance training.

Heat Training. A method training used to induce favorable adaptation in the temperature regulation mechanism and increased salt retention by the body at time of intense sweating. It is best implemented by hard work of about eight minutes duration which ends in exhaustion.

Hill Training or Work. The running of hills, up and down, to develop the strength and skills demanded by these two distinct characteristics of cross-country and marathon running.

Indoor Track. The winter indoor running, jumping and throwing competition which usually starts in November or December and ends when weather permits outdoor competition.

Intercollegiate Athletics. A term referring to college and university level competition.

Interscholastic Athletics. A term referring to high school level competition.