

Coaching the JV squad

If the team is large enough and talent levels diverse enough it may become necessary to split the squad between Varsity (top 7-10 runners) and Junior Varsity (JV).

Usually the JVs are made up of younger athletes, athletes who are out for Cross Country in order to 'get in shape' for another sport, athletes who 'want to be a part of a team', etc. It is up to the coach to help them to have a good experience in Cross Country and to learn the valuable life lessons that Cross Country teaches (hard work, discipline, team work, etc).

Many of these athletes show up on the first day of practice with a very limited knowledge of distance running. Typically many are in not very good physical shape, with zero or close to zero miles having been run over the summer. Some have never engaged in sports or had very much physical activity. In developing a training program for these athletes the coach needs to 'individualize' as much as practical. The coach needs to 'accept these athletes where they are at'. The coach needs to recognize that a less than fit athlete is more susceptible to injury and to devise a training program which recognizes this. However, that does not mean that these athletes should not have a challenging (for them) training regimen.

More time needs to be spent with the JV squad than with the Varsity squad on things like; running form, pacing, cross training (push-up and abdominal exercises), nutrition, etc. The 'rookies' are also more likely to experience 'owees'. (Owees can be defined as minor aches and pains and usually aren't anything serious,)

It is always very helpful to have a 'senior leader' on the JV squad. This is an athlete with some experience in Cross Country who has some leadership talents. These athletes can be tasked with helping the 'newbies' to learn the ropes and to become aware of the unique team traditions that most Cross Country teams have.

Cross Country is a unique sport in that it is both a team sport and an individual sport. While the team's success is paramount, each individual athlete wants to move up on the team's pecking order. There is nothing wrong with stressing to the #28 runner that their job is to go after #27. By having internal team competition the entire team gets better.

As a means of maintaining excitement for the athletes who will probably never even come close to making the varsity squad, the coach can add competition to the JV races at meets. For a JV race the coach can score the meet any way that the coach wants to. A good way to maintain excitement amongst all of the JVs is to score the entire team against the other team. For example if we have 20 JVs and our opponent has 15 JVs, we score the top 15 in the same manner as a varsity race would be scored.

As the season winds toward a close many of the athletes will have run against their competition at least once already during the season. By use of tools like athletic.net it is relatively easy to provide the JVs

with 'scouting reports' on their individual competition. If a photographer (parent, student, etc) has taken photos during the season's meets, athletes can also be provided with photos of their competition.

Above all in coaching the JV squad:

- Make it fun.
- Make them feel important and valued.
- Make it challenging
- Celebrate each individual athlete's improvements/successes
- Accept them where they are at.