

# Willows High School Boys and Girls Cross Country 2026

Welcome to the 2026 Willows HS Cross Country Season! We look forward to working with all our student-athletes to achieve their running and racing goals this season.

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## Running and Coaching Philosophy

Coaches LaGrande, Weston, and Stupey strongly believe that running is a lifelong sport regardless of ability, and which promotes healthy bodies and strong minds. We also believe that participation in team sports is educational and promotes positive habits, goal setting, teamwork, camaraderie, and sportsmanship. As coaches, we strive to help our student-athletes grow as runners, mature as individuals, and enjoy the benefits of teamwork and sportsmanship. We believe Cross Country (XC) is the best sport and one that anyone can excel at with time, patience, and commitment. Running fitness is a foundation for most sports, so your participation in XC will give you a competitive edge for winter and spring sports. If you are a beginning runner, we want you! If you are a returning JV runner, we want you! If you are a returning Varsity runner, we want you!

## Shoes and Clothing

One great thing about XC is that you don't have to invest in a lot of equipment. **However, good running shoes are important. Everyone should begin the season with a new pair of running shoes and may need a replacement pair mid-season.** Good quality shoes are very important in limiting lower leg injuries. There are many types of running shoes (cushioned, support, stability) based on running form and your physical needs. If you are new to the sport of XC, I highly recommend visiting Fleet Feet (Chico/Davis) so the experts there can do a proper fitting/assessment to help you find the correct shoe. We will run on a variety of surfaces (pavement, gravel, dirt, grass) in wet and dry conditions. You want a shoe that holds up to the training and racing demands of the season.

**Socks-** shop for running socks made of wool or other moisture wicking fabrics. You will find a variety of running socks wherever you shop for running shoes. Avoid cotton! Socks made for running will keep your feet dry, blister free, and supported during the season.

**Clothing-** shop for moisture wicking running shorts/shirts, and sports bras (ladies). Moisture wicking quick dry clothing will keep you cool and prevent chaffing in sensitive areas.

### **Summer Base Training**

Cross Country (XC) is a demanding sport. It's an aerobic sport with fall success built on summer preparation. XC league racing season begins in August, but your success depends on your fitness level as you begin race training. XC runners live by the motto: Summer miles = November smiles. **To prepare for the racing season, you must begin conditioning in June.** Our team fitness will improve throughout the season with consistent attendance to all practice sessions, and a slow but steady progression in mileage and intensity. To prepare for our first week of team conditioning, here is a general summer training plan you can do on your own or with a group of friends throughout your summer break. Do your workouts during the cool hours of the day to avoid potential heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Hydration is key! Drink plenty of water throughout the day to avoid dehydration. If you are new to running, you can YouTube some videos on any of these exercises to see what they should look like when performed correctly.

**Easy runs** are those at conversational pace. You should finish feeling like you could have run longer. For beginning runners, this may take a few weeks of conditioning to achieve this level.

**Strides** are short, quick accelerations lasting only 10-15 seconds, with short jogs or brief walks in between. These prepare your legs and cardiovascular system for more intensive workouts. Focus on short, quick turnover with high knees and high heel kicks. These should be done after the run.

**Hills**-run a course with hills of various lengths and grades. When running a hill route, increase your effort slightly on the hills, and run easy on the downhill and flat portions. Hills are great for strength and help you prepare for higher intensity workouts.

**Surges** are an increase in your running pace for a short time then a reduction in speed back to your easy pace with no breaks in running. Use your easy pace as your recovery rather than walking. As your fitness improves, these surges will increase in time and intensity to prepare your legs and cardiovascular system for race pace.

#### **Dynamic warm up:**

High knees (2 x 30 sec)

Butt kicks (2 x 30 sec)

Ankle hops (2 x 30 sec)

Leg swings (front to back, side to side, 10 each leg)

Arm circles (10 forward, 10 backward)

**Strength:**

Split 1: Push-ups: 3x12

Lunges/squats: 3x12

Calf raises: 3 x15

Plank: 3x30 sec

Box jumps: 3x10

Glute Bridges Knees at 90 degrees : 3 x 12

Bicycle crunches: 3x15 each side

**June: Weeks 1-4** - Dynamic warm up; 20-25 min of continuous **easy** jogging/running each morning followed by 3-5 **strides** of 50 meters two days a week. Strength work 3 days a week.

**Wednesday**-cross train: swim or bike 35-50 min

**Friday- Rest**

**Saturday**- 35-45 min easy run with **hills** (if you have access to hills). Include five 30 second **surges** mid-run if you are not running with hills.

**Sunday- Rest**

**July: Weeks 5-7**- 30- 35 min of **easy** continuous jogging/running each morning followed by 3-5 **strides** of 100 meters two days a week. Strength work 3 days a week.

**Wednesday**- cross train: Swim or bike for 45-60 min

**Friday-Rest**

**Saturday**- 50-60 min **easy** run with **hills** (if you have access to hills). Include five 30 second **surges** mid-run if you are not running with hills.

**Sunday- Rest**

**\*\*First week of team conditioning (July 27-July 31)- 8:00 am-11:00 am -meet in front of the gym.**

## **What to expect**

You can expect four weeks of progressive preseason strength training designed by Coach Stupey which focuses on strength, power, endurance, and core stability, setting a solid foundation for the cross country season. During the season we will practice five days a week (Mon-Thurs; Saturday) from 3-4:30/5 pm, Saturday morning long runs (8 am), and rest days Friday and Sunday. Each day will include a dynamic warm up, followed by running workouts, a cool down, and stretching. Some workouts will require driving off campus to run hills. On days when afternoon temperatures are near or above 100 degrees, we will use the HS pool for pool running. Our workouts will include a variety of interval (speed) training at the track, tempo running, and hill training, with recovery runs in between. JV runners will race a two mile course and Varsity runners will race a three mile course. XC teams are scored on the finish place of the first five runners on each team (1<sup>st</sup> place= 1 pt, 2<sup>nd</sup> place= 2 pts, 3<sup>rd</sup> place= 3 pts, etc). The lowest scoring team is the winner. A perfect score is 15 pts. It is very important that every runner shows up on race day to guarantee that we get a team score.

## **Team Communications**

Coach LaGrande will use GroupMe for summer communication. Parent Square will also be used throughout the season. More information on this will be sent out after the first week of practice.

We look forward to a great fall season and wish you a summer full of fun and fitness. If you have any questions, please contact one of the coaches.