

Cross-Country Testimony

The greatest sport in the world, as revealed by its greatest constituents...



“Cross-country was always my first love in running. It’s a wonderful, cathartic experience—a pure feeling being out in the country, especially in the fall when the weather is cool and the leaves change.”
- Craig Virgin

“It does not matter whether you run the 800m or the marathon, cross-country training is very important. It builds strength for all distances.”
- Kip Cheruiyot

“When you put yourself on the line in a race and expose yourself to the unknown, you learn things about yourself that are very exciting.”
- Doris Brown Heritage

“Cross-country reminded me of running and racing at its purest. The time means nothing in cross-country; the only thing that matters is how well each person competes!”
- Patrick Rizzo

“Cross-country is still a social sport for the participants. It’s a convivial affair. Track was always very different. We didn’t make friends in track. It was

full of fear and trepidation. Cross-country is where you made your friendships.”
- Chris Chataway

“It’s relentless. There’s nothing like it, I keep saying it’s as good as winning the Olympics, or better, because all the top runners are there, in the one race.”
- Paula Radcliffe

“When you experience the run, you relive the hunt. Running is about 30 miles of chasing prey that can outrun you in a sprint, and tracking it down and bringing life back to your village. It’s a beautiful thing.”
- Shawn Found

“Cross-country is racing in its purest form and it always brings me back to the pure love of competition. I don’t look at the clock and check my splits or worry about the weather. You get out there and just go, trying to push it to the max. I have had some battle royals with great runners as well as some total blow outs and that excitement is something I love. The strategy in cross-country is so much more than on the track or road. On the track you just try not to get dropped and kick at the end. On the road you can focus on time and splits. But in cross country things can change all the time, and you need to know your body and be ready mentally prepared to run on your own. It doesn’t matter if you have dropped everyone or you are being dropped, you have to be able to push yourself.”
- Dathan Ritzenhein

“Of all forms of pedestrianism and, indeed, of all branches of athletics there can be nothing superior to cross-country running for either pleasure or health.

The sport itself is ideal, whether a race be contested in fine or muddy weather. Track or road running is apt to grow monotonous, however exciting it may be; but there is nothing monotonous in an open country run. Even the training itself is almost as enjoyable as the race, and from first to last I defy anybody to find a single point to cavil at. ”
- Alfred Shrubb

“ I had so much fun today! Cross-country is just the purest part of our sport. It's where I got started. It's the grassroots of everything that I do. ”
- Shalane Flanagan

“ I love controlling a race, chewing up an opponent. Let's get down and dirty. Let's fight it out. It's raw, animalistic, with no one to rely on but yourself. There's no better feeling than that. ”
- Adam Goucher

“ Cross-country running, and, above all, hare-and-hound running, is fun while you are doing it. The farther you go the better you feel—it is an increasing joy as long as it lasts—you are free as a bird almost. Clothes, sidewalks, ridiculous stiff boxes called hats, ridiculous narrow grooves called streets, trolley cars, "L" trains, and other artificial means of locomotion are thrown aside; you're yourself and the world's your own. Are there ten miles or so of rough country between you and home—ten miles of thickets and meadow-land and brooks and rugged hillsides? You've got your legs and you've got your lungs, and you know them and know what they can do. And so it's up the hills and through the thickets and over the meadows—hit up the pace and the devil take the hindmost! In all the list of athletic sports there is none that will do more to brush away from you the dust of

overcivilization, that will do more to set you on your feet and give you a grip on the world than the run across country.”

- Arthur Brown Ruhl

“That night, everyone studied the map and flicked through the old log books detailing past catches. I gleaned all I could about the game. Hounds were described as “grey, unrecognisable figures, with cruel, animal, nightmare faces advancing along by silent leaps”. They were involved in “stalking, bravading, cliff-scaling and scientific circumnavigations - resulting in the desperate chase and slaughter of the more injured hare”. The most devious would drop prone on rocks, pretending to be injured, so the hare would feel obliged to come to the rescue. But the hares, the “vermin”, could be equally terrifying. There were legends of some hares defending themselves with iron-shod beams.”

- Alice Tompson

“The only fault with cross-country running is its severe exclusiveness. Though having all the physical advantages, it has none of the entertaining merits of football, as it is a sport which gives gratification only to those who engage in it and must always suffer from a lack of public patronage for that reason.”

- Colin A. Shields

“I have a passion for cross-country. I love it. I love being out and running through fields and up hills, down hills and around curves. It is more interesting to me than running around a track and it is something I really enjoy. Early on in my running career I didn't like track that much. I could go on the track, run fast and be successful, but I didn't like it as much as cross-country. I am built for cross-country as I am strong—

I'm not a skinny waif, but I'm a solid muscular guy who can handle unbalanced ground and for whatever reasons I am good at it.”

- Adam Goucher

“I doubt whether any man ever feels more thoroughly satisfied with his physical condition, or more keenly anticipates the pleasures which such condition has fitted him to enjoy, than a well-trained cross-country runner who follows the sport for the sport's sake. He is strong in legs and heart and lungs, the red blood leaps through his veins, and as he starts away over the hills on his errand of health he is the personification of freedom.”

- Ernest Harold Baynes

“Real Hare-and-Hounds, where the hares are used for laying a paper trail, affords delightful sport. It is one for which a man does not need to be trained like a race horse. The pace is never fast until the finish, and the hunting for the scent not only rests the tired ones, but is a delightful change from the monotony of running. It gives all the pleasures of fox hunting, and tests the ingenuity of the hares in baffling their pursurers. It is the difference of a chase and a race; one full of incident, the other a monotonous struggle.”

- Walter S. Vosburgh

“Cross-country racing is a supreme test of endurance, and should be indulged in by well-trained, healthy men only. It is a splendid sport, but it is not for young boys, or weaklings. After the preliminary paper-chasing, the work of training becomes more severe, and the men are usually taken over somewhat shorter courses at a greater speed. These courses are usually laid out beforehand and are known to the runners, so there is no stopping to hunt for the trail as in hare and

hounds. The athletes are taken over these courses faster and faster as they gradually improve in their work, until the poor ones are weeded out, leaving the fastest to be selected for a team to represent the club. ”

- Ernest Harold Baynes

“ The development of cross-country running in our preparatory schools, colleges, and clubs has been the most important factor in raising the standard of distance runners in this country. It was not until the United States began to foster cross-country running that we began to develop good distance runners. Cross-country running, if properly indulged in, is one of the most healthful recreations I know of, even if one does not follow it in the hope of becoming a champion distance runner. If indulged in moderately it strengthens every part of the body, and I have seen many a boy who was almost made over by the sport. Not only is it good for distance runners, but in a modified form is invaluable for footballers, oarsmen, and those who merely want some good conditioning exercise. ”

- Michael C. Murphy

“ Now the sport is entirely changed. "Hare and Hounds" or paper-chasing, is almost a thing of the past in this country; it has given way to cross-country racing, a more severe, though less enjoyable, form of the game. That the latter is popular with athletes however, is shown by the fact that while there was only one pack in the United States in 1877, there are a thousand in the country today. ”

- The New York Times, February 1893

“ Cross-country running is the most pleasurable form of distance work. If possible it is best to get a number to

run together. For three or four days in the week the whole pack can go together, led by a man who has sense enough not to get them racing. Then, about a mile or a mile and a half from home, on the return, the men can be lined up and allowed to race the remainder of the distance. If one wishes to try out the men, it is best to do so by handicaps, or by dividing the men into two or more packs, according to their speed. A very great deal of the pleasure in this work will depend upon the leader, and it is an essential that this position should be given to a man who will watch his pack and run at such a speed that, although there is no loafing, the run will not be a race.”
- George Orton

“It’s my love for a bunch of reasons. The actual team aspect, the close-knit bunch of guys that you work with everyday. It’s done in the fall. I love the fall, the leaves on the ground, I love that time of year. There’s the hills -- the whole non-circularness -- of cross country. You’re going places, not just running around an oval. It builds tremendous strength for track. It’s an equalizer for kids who might not have the marks on the track. In cross country other things come into play where they can score and get recognition, and times don’t mean anything.”
- Pat Porter

“They [the British Athletic Federation] don’t consider cross-country very glamorous so no money is pumped into it. Yet they manage to find the funds to send sprinters abroad for six months. They have ignored it for so long that we are in a minor slump. I believe it is time to push the profile up. Distance running in Britain, whether it’s on the track or in marathons stems from a good cross-country background. You will ignore that at your peril.”
- Eamonn Martin

“One of the last races of Casey’s cross-country career took place on a hot, muggy afternoon over a punishing course, and you know where this is going. He held steady with the front of the pack for most of the distance, but dropped off dramatically in the last half mile and finished in the middle. Then he collapsed and rolled to his side in deep pain that he had knowingly, willingly put himself in on his own terms for his own reasons. I ran to him and put my hand on his shoulder and he rolled around and looked up with eyes stuttering to find my face. ‘How’d I do?’ he asked. ‘Incredible,’ I said. ‘Tremendous. Drink something.’ He coughed and turned to his side and his trainers came by in a cart and asked my wife and me to join him in a waiting ambulance. The paramedics ran through a quick assessment and told us he would be fine and that we were all welcome to stay until he felt better or until they had to use the stretcher for the next kid-whichever came first. Casey smiled and looked around and shook his head. His spikes were covered in mud that ran up both legs into his shorts. His tank top was mashed with sweat and grass and saliva. But the color was returning to his face. He was starting to feel better. ‘You get a lot of tennis players in this ambulance?’ I asked the paramedics as they began to put away their gear. They chuckled and shook their heads. ‘You ever get a basketball player in here who pushed himself so hard he literally couldn’t see straight? Or what about soccer players? Do they ever just collapse in pain during the normal course of play?’ ‘Only the runners do that,’ a woman said as she unhooked the monitors from Casey’s body and folded the wires into her pockets. Only the runners.”

- Marc Parent

“I think the World Cross Country race is one of the best races there is in running. I think cross country

running in general is a perfect place to learn to race. On the track people worry about splits and time but in cross you learn how to compete against other runners. World Cross is an aggressive race, you have to learn how to hurt, go out harder than you're ready to and fight for what you can.”
- Thom Hunt

“Cross country is what I always liked most. It was my world, my passion. Before the IAAF introduced the short course in 1998, all the world class athletes from 1500 meters to the marathon were in the same race.”
- Paul Tergat

“Having shown what an earnest cross-country race may be under certain conditions, when the men who meet are athletes of fully matured powers, and who have undergone a special course of training to prepare themselves for the strain to which such a contest necessarily subjects them, we will now consider cross-country as a pastime and as an exercise which, while affording much sport, will at the same time develop the heart and lungs and the muscles in such a manner that after a few sessions practice in the sport, they may be subjected to the most severe tests, with complete freedom from injurious effects.”
- Walter Dohm

“The best seasons of the year for cross-country work are spring and fall, and therefore everyone who is so inclined may begin to run at once, and after the stiffness of the first run or two has worn off, it will prove as pleasant and enjoyable a pastime as any on the list of boys' sports. Only give it a fair trial, and the increase in girth of the chest, the thighs, and the

calves will repay any boy for the two hours a week he ought to devote to this most healthful exercise.”
- Walter Dohm

“The start of a World Cross Country event is like riding a horse in the middle of a buffalo stampede. It’s a thrill if you keep up, but one slip and you’re nothing but hoof prints.”
- Ed Eyestone

“High school running was divided into two camps: those who ran cross-country, and those who ran track. There was a clear distinction. The kind of runner you were largely mirrored your approach to life. The cross-country guys thought the track runners were high-strung and prissy, while the track guys viewed the cross-country guys as a bunch of athletic misfits.”
- Dean Karnazes

“It’s true that the guys on the cross-country team were a motley bunch. Solidly built with long, unkempt hair and rarely shaven faces, they looked more like a bunch of lumberjacks than runners. They wore baggy shorts, bushy wool socks, and furry beanie caps, even when it was roasting hot outside. Clothing rarely matched. The cross-country guys hung out in late-night coffee shops and read books by Kafka and Kerouac. They rarely talked about running; it was just something they did. The track guys, on the other hand, were obsessed. Speed was all they talked about. Track members seldom stayed out past 8:00pm, even on weekends. They spent an inordinate amount of time shaking their limbs and loosening up. The cross-country guys, on the other hand, never stretched at all. The track guys ran intervals and kept logbooks detailing their mileage. Everything was

measured, dissected, and evaluated. Cross-country guys didn't take notes. They just found a trail and went running. Sometimes the runs would last for an hour, sometimes three. It all depended on how they felt that day. After the run they would move on to the next thing, which was usually surfing.”

- Dean Karnazes

“During my interviews with the coaches and captain of both teams, the differences were obvious. The track team was cliquish and hierarchical. I felt like I was being interrogated and examined. The cross-country team, on the other hand, seemed to be about working together. They ran for the good of the team rather than for personal gain. One runner might cover for another's weakness, so both would hang together through the low points of a run rather than trying to “drop” each other.”

- Dean Karnazes

“[On the World Cross Country Championships] If you love cross country you've got to get out there and see this, because to me it's the most competitive cross country meet. It's the most competitive distance run that exists in distance running. People might say well the Olympic games; split up with people between the 5,000 meters, 10,000 meters, some steeplechasers, even some marathoners. In cross country they're all in one race, in a 12km on the men's side, 8km on the women's side. Certainly that brings its own special thing to this race. I was very upset when they went to every other year. The event is amazing.”

- Keith Hanson

“Cross-country running isn't done on a prepared surface. Sure, it would be easier for me to stand in the middle of a track and take splits, but trail running is

more valuable to what my runners are trying to accomplish.”
- Mark Wetmore

“Factors beyond terrain set cross-country apart--and these deserve protecting and promoting as well. There are inherent differences in attitude and approach. In this several months a year set aside for cross-country racing, emphasis shifts away from times. On most courses, times are meaningless. This is pure sport. The race itself is everything; comparisons with those running at another place and time are nothing.”
- Bob Anderson and Joe Henderson

“Cross-country--as a competitive, conditioning and companionship activity--has limitless potential. It offers a combination of ingredients that neither track nor road racing can match. We're not suggesting that it *replace* the other two facets of racing--just that it complement them more effectively than it now does.”
- Bob Anderson and Joe Henderson

“Sizeable numbers of disenchanting city-dwellers--and not just the radical young--have migrated to the country to live a simpler sort of life. Others, stuck in the city, split for the country at every opportunity to back-pack, mountain-climb, hike and run--away from the noise, pavement and fumes of the crowded, car-oriented metropolitan areas. The more urbanized and mechanized a person's daily life becomes, the more he wants and needs to reestablish non-mechanical contact with the natural elements. The more he enjoys the feel of the unpaved earth under his feet and the taste of unpolluted air. What does this have to do with cross-country? Everything. Even the runner gets

somewhat separated from the earth, and from running in its purest and simplest form.”
- Bob Anderson and Joe Henderson

“There are two basic types of distance people--track runners and road runners. Tommie Track spends most of his year running around in circles, usually on artificial surfaces and on a rigidly standardized course designed for speed. Ronnie Road gets a bit more variety; he gets to see some of the countryside, but still he's on courses designed for cars and must compete with them. Both track and road racing are mechanical. They're watch-conscious, and runners of both spend most of their year chasing the elusive time. In cross-country, though, both Tommie Track and Ronnie Road can get together and get away from the artificial surface and dependence on the stopwatch. Back to the earth for a couple of months. Away from restrictive tracks and traffic and times. Back to the purity, beauty, variety and challenge of a run in the country.”
- Bob Anderson and Joe Henderson

“Every track race is pretty much like every other. See one 440 track, you've seen them all. About the only thing that differentiates one event from another is the number of times you circle the track. Even in road races--where there's an increasing emphasis on times--courses are becoming increasingly alike--i.e., drab. Variety is lacking. Not so in cross-country.”
- Bob Anderson and Joe Henderson

“I think a lot of people were looking at cross country as a preparatory thing for the track season, but I think he realized he had a particular gift to run up and down hills and through grass and mud. I think he felt

like it was a gift, so he was going to utilize it. [on Pat Porter].”
- Ed Eyestone

“One of the greatest attributes of cross-country is the opportunity to travel, meet people, and see how others exist. Through travel one learns to get along with all kinds and types of people. The determination demanded by success in cross-country running carries over into all phases of life. By learning to work and strive for success we learn to overcome obstacles and to solve problems. The self-discipline demanded by the tedious hours of practice assists me to meet many problems with confidence.”
- Gerry Lindgren

“I think it takes a person’s mind away from the pressures of the academic areas and allows a mental and physical relaxation. If you run cross-country well you have something to look forward to each week.”
- Pat McMahon

“Fifty yards from the finish, he was vaguely aware of the patter of footsteps behind him. The steps came nearer, he heard the agonized breathing of another runner at his shoulder. He knew then that the time had come to call upon the last resources of his stamina, to make use of that splendid reserve of strength which had never yet failed him.

He wanted to look around, to find out definitely whether it was Benton or Webb who was giving him battle. But his athletic instinct forbade his turning; the only thing he could do was to fight his way to the finish, to kill off all opposition in that last fifty yards.

He had been sure, but an instant before, that he had reached the limit of his endurance, of his speed. But now, with the necessity of greater speed urging him on, he somehow increased his pace. With every step of the way an agony, with his whole body crying out for relief, he called upon his weary muscles for additional effort--and forged slowly ahead. The heavy breathing at his shoulder grew indistinct, lost itself in the thunder of cheers which struck into his ears as from a great distance. And then, the tape loomed up almost over him; he threw himself forward, arms upraised. The tape snapped quietly across his chest. With a wheezing sigh of relief, he let himself go for a moment; then opened his eyes and smiled happily...”
- David Stone "Yank Brown, Cross Country Runner"
1922

“Cross country has always been my greatest passion. I love winter weather, getting sloppy, using the terrain in my race tactics and also the strength that cross country builds. My most successful years on the track and in marathons have been when I trained for cross country in the winter.”
- Deena Kastor

“Cross country has always been a huge passion. I love the sport. It's the essence of distance running and is distance running in it's most natural form. It's where I feel my roots lie in the sport. To me, this is a celebration of the sport, being able to go to Boulder and be a part of cross country this year. I definitely don't have the same perspective as the past when I used to run cross country. I feel now that I just owe it to myself to get out there and enjoy the sport in its most natural environment.”
- Deena Kastor

“I wanted to win this race with every fibre of my body. The only way to survive in international cross country races is to go out hard. Today my hard was harder than anyone else's.”
- Lynn Jennings

“You're battling terrain, the elements and yourself as much as anything else. It's a sport where each kid can see rewards for the hard work that they put in. It's a special kind of kid who thrives on that.”
- Dave Smith

“Every time I get real anxious about it (NCAA Championships), I think back to 2009, when we barely hung on at nationals and beat Oregon -- they were closing hard on us, we were moving back and they were moving forward -- and we end up beating them by 14, or 15 points, and we were losing three all-americans at that point. I thought man, good thing we won now, because next year it's going to be impossible. We've got a bunch of guys who have never done it, and who knows when we'll have a chance to win it again. The next year we won by 120 points. I guess you've got to be confident in the guys you have, and know that they want it as bad or more badly than we want it as coaches; and that each of these guys wants to write their own story, and they don't want to be Oklahoma State where German Fernandez ran, they want to be Oklahoma State where Neil Smith ran. And each of these guys is getting the chance now in the next year or two to write part of the history of Oklahoma State.”
- Dave Smith

“Cross country should be a standard part of preparation for middle and long distance athletes, as it was for myself, Ovet, Cram, Elliott, John Walker,

Aouita, Gebrselassie, Bekele and many others who have also been successful on the track. Until we get back to recognizing that cross country is an important part of the conditioning process then we will not see standards of European distance running rise.”

- Sebastian Coe

“Cross-country (racing) comes from a background of running through plowed fields, going down dirt trails and maybe even hopping over a couple of fences. Somehow we’ve gotten away from that. It’s become more of a grass track meet. More than anything, we want to help the sport grow and make it more interesting again.”

- Max King

“The art of running consists, in essence, of reaching the threshold of unconsciousness at the instant of breasting the tape. It is not an easy process for the body rebels against such agonizing usage and must be disciplined by the spirit and the mind. Few events in sport offer so ultimate a test of human courage and human will and human ability to dare and endure for the simple sake of struggle.”

- Paul O’ Neil (in the first issue of "Sports Illustrated" August 16, 1954)

“I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend the USATF Level II School at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. What I came away with was a new attitude about the importance that the cross country experience plays in the lives of athletes. It was refreshing to hear elite coaches talk unapologetically about the role of high school athletics in the overall scheme of the United States Track & Field development system. For the first time I

listened to people talk about the running lifestyle as an end goal rather than a temporary diversion for student-athletes. I began to realize that we too often short-change running and the running culture by calling it recreation or an extracurricular activity rather than treating it as a legitimate career path.

I am frustrated with the number of kids that are unwilling to allow running to become something more important in their lives because they have been conditioned to believe that athletics is somehow less gratifying, less noble, and less viable as a career path than the so called academic options. As Matt Ridenour would say, the greatest relationships in our lives and many of our most important opportunities have come from being a part of this running culture. Why do we keep treating it like a hobby? ”

- Chuck Woolridge

“ In my junior year at Westfield (New Jersey) High School, in 1957, the cross-country runners were issued canvas shoes with thin, hard soles that had no cushioning, no lateral support, and almost no heel -- they were what a later generation would call "minimalist". Then I heard about a very different kind of running shoe that all the Olympic runners were wearing, made by an exotic German company called Adidas. In contrast to the dull black canvas shoes we'd been given by the high school, these Adidas shoes were bright white with green stripes. They were made of superlight kangaroo skin, and when I put them on I thought I could leap like a kangaroo. They were cushioned and felt weightless. I had a magical cross-country season, breaking the school record that had been set by Westfield's state champion Edgar Hoos ten years before. Can a sixteen-year-old be in love? I was in love with my running shoes. ”

- Ed Ayres

“The trail here reminded me of high school and college cross-country. I had always loved trail running in November. The air is exhilarating, and the sky glints through half-bare branches. October has its gorgeous colors, but by November they have turned to something darker, like the bare oak benches in an old meeting house. Even at dawn, you know it is the dusk of the year, when the mysteries of the forest are deepest, the promises most seductive. It is also when the footing is most treacherous. Damp, dead leaves cover the rocks, and in the shadows of the trees those lurking rocks can remain slippery all winter.”
- Ed Ayres

“Running is all about movement, and it's extreme movement, and that makes it very meaningful because movement is really the essence of life. In our modern lifestyle we're not runners anymore -- so we are basically disconnected from what we previously had to do. Most of us are out of shape and we don't have to run for our hamburger or our dinner. But deep down we are still all runners... so our minds, as much as our muscles, are part of this running phenotype. So I'm inspired to no end by people who really do great things; I'm moved by others' dreams, by their devotion and courage and pursuit of this excellence. Especially kids. Because you realize how much of a difference it makes, in the long run. How much little things matter, and how far they take you.”
- Bernd Heinrich

“It's so pure. I'm sort of a nature geek. I embrace the weather changes. They are what makes me endure as an athlete. You lean into the wind; you get wet and dirty and cold, and experience the whole spectrum of sensations.”
- Lynn Jennings

“I think it was a combination of weather, difficult conditions, tough courses and the fact that everyone in the world showed up for those races. I represented the U.S. at eight straight world cross country championships and I'm proud of that, because it was an event where there was no prize money. I didn't do it for the money. I did world cross country because I loved representing the U.S. at that event. I loved guiding and leading our team and there was just something incredibly exhilarating about that incredibly difficult race and I loved the rough and tumble, and I was good at it and I loved it.”
- Lynn Jennings

“I think cross country on the professional level plays to my strengths. Running over varied terrain helps the strength runners. On the track, where there are no obstacles and perfect conditions, it's harder to push people over the edge and break them. Cross country allows a little more room for that kind of running.”
- Chris Derrick

“There's nothing quite so gentle, deep and irrational as our running ...and nothing so savage, and so wild.”
- Bernd Heinrich

“Cross-country has always been a vital part of my training program. You can develop fine muscular endurance and suppleness in your stride by running cross-country. It also develops good running form and strengthens your muscles.”
- Arthur Lydiard

“In cross country it was all about the team as I got very close to the guys I ran with during those four years. We ran so much together and got to know each other very well. The teammates who are still alive are close friends of mine to this day. What I liked the most about cross country were the friendships with my teammates and our team spirit.”
- Don Gehrmann

“Cross-country, indoor track, and outdoor track were great experiences for me. My favorite as a team sport, getting to know my teammates and to have good friends was cross country.”
- Don Gehrmann

“My love of outdoors was kind of the problem... I had this tug of war going on. I wanted to be an Olympic champion; that was my goal. But I saw wilderness being encroached on by civilization. I kept thinking, It isn't going to be there forever; I better enjoy it now. That became my demise in track.”
- 1961 NCAA Cross-Country Champion Dale Story

“Cross-country was the most important thing to me. I didn't know I was a miler yet. I considered Van Cortlandt a hallowed place.”
- Marty Liquori

“At the start we were stretched out in a great line across the park, and then the starter raised his arm and fired the gun. Displaying more heart than pace sense, I stayed up with the leaders in the early stages and was soon caught up in the exhilaration of it all. I felt as though I were participating on foot in the Charge of the Light Brigade.”
- Ron Delany

“My fancy thoughts were unceremoniously knocked out of me as we reached the first turn. In the “squeeze in” for position I tasted for the first time the sharp elbows of my American opponents. And educated elbows they had, too. After receiving two or three strategic belts in the ribs, I realized this was war. I was facing the most competitive nation in the world...a factor that would provide me with thrilling competition in many a race for the next five years, indoors and out.”
- Ron Delany

“I often roamed the great bird sanctuaries, lake shores and wooded parks, letting my imagination construct vivid pictures of what it would be like to run effortlessly through the woods. Finally, while wandering one of the trails in a wooded preserve when I was 12, visions of the past when frontiersmen ran to elude pursuers came over me. Springy pine needles and dry leaves carpeted the path until it curved out of sight and distant trees waited in the half-light. Swept up in the imagery, I could no longer resist the urge to run. I raced away at full tilt. It was a dream come true. Great strides carried me up and down easy hills. One crisp autumn breeze was charged with the scent of pines and in filling my lungs seemed to propel me onward. I would have quit running then, except I noticed one salient difference between racing and other sports. If, for instance, after practice my swat at a baseball missed by only three inches instead of four, the result of the game was precisely the same. But in running, even minute improvement could be detected by the watch, and there was lots of room for improvement. This was the first concrete encouragement I'd received at a sport, and I began to look forward to the cross-country season which, without confining stadiums and tracks,

would be more akin to my initial concept of free running. Cross-country captured my heart.”
- Ron Daws

“Cross-country makes use of our natural resources-- which, sadly, are diminishing all around us. It brings the runner closer to nature, to God’s gift of things green and fragrant and pristine--without artificial preservatives. It takes the legs of man and woman churning over the land, not the bypasses, becoming ever more sensitive to and sanitized from the environment.”
- Marc Bloom

“You are running cross-country if you are spurning the precision and predictability and symmetry of a quarter-mile track, or if you are avoiding the convenience and comfort of a carefully marked road. Let us know where we are, exactly, when we run. Let us separate the authentic from the imitation, because to do so will cultivate our senses and heighten our experience.”
- Marc Bloom

“To run on a golf course is to run cross-country, even though such terrain is a contrivance of sorts. We must consider these places in terms of our culture. Just as our language changes and we accept altered usage, our land changes and as runners we must accept that. We may not like it, but we must adjust to it.”
- Marc Bloom

“There is perhaps no branch of sport that has in it the widely beneficial elements that cross-country running has. Although it is a comparatively new game in

America, it has acquired about New York alone a tremendous following. One of its greatest attractions lies in the fact that it is absolutely free. There is no possibility of gain connected with it. It cannot be connected with gate receipts and can have no awards to prompt any suggestion or taint of professionalism. As a spectacle, it attracts along the courses used as many as 50,000 people. It is a sport that deserves wider popularity than it has, and it promises to grow until it becomes one of the major sports of the nation.”

- The New York Times, December 1907

“ This is cross-country running. It is man meeting nature, not avoiding it. Much has been written lately about the emotional high attained from running long distances at a comfortable pace. It has been described as a euphoric state in which the rhythms of body and mind become compatible. “Those possessing the stamina for close to an hour of steady running report an altered state of consciousness, a sudden rush of perceptive power coupled with an almost Zen-like peace.” That’s from a Newsweek cover story. This consciousness, this perception, this feeling of power is at its height on a cross-country run when the stimuli are most sensual and the feedback is most refreshing.”

- Marc Bloom

“ Get lost. Get away from the tracks and off the roads and run cross-country. Spurn the traffic and the noise and the polluted air. Say goodbye to the angry dogs and the jibing neighbors. Ignore time and distance and rigidity. Seek the fresh, the pure, the varied, the space. Feel the swoosh of your feet meeting the moist, pliable turf. Move from grass to gravel, from sand to leaves. Fool the wind by ducking amid the trees. Gallop the open spaces, up and down hills that

you will favor, not fear, that will enrich your strength, not deflate it. Take it all in. Absorb the sights and scents, and watch the seasons change with the foliage. The powers of observation grow: little things will be noticed and pondered. Slight weather variances and terrain alterations will be detected. You will be finely tuned, and your senses will be as radar, reacting to the most subtle stimuli. This is good, for when we are indifferent to our surroundings we do not help or protect them.”

- Marc Bloom

“Cross-country is different. It is a team sport in the purest sense of the word. Cross-country squads do have superstars and have won honors because of them. But this can happen only when the supporting cast of runners achieves success in its own right. Many a team, even with four superior harriers, has finished a race out of the money because the key fifth man “got lost” in the hills. At a post-season banquet, when the sting of defeat has been soothed by the passage of time, the athletes may joke of the guy who’s still running.”

- Marc Bloom

“I was scared, really scared, so I wanted to lead all the way. I didn’t look back at all. I was afraid I might see somebody gaining on me.”

- Gerry Lindgren

“They don’t even know how old they are. It takes years to develop that much endurance. Their age is too much...I thought they were bluffing, but they showed no sign of weakness. I never dreamed cross-country could be that fast.”

- Craig Virgin [talking about Henry Rono and the Kenyan runners]

“Of my three wins I’d call this one the toughest, due to the competition, weather and everything put together. I’ve never seen a guy [Nick Rose of England] that far ahead of me in a cross-country race. But with a half mile to go, I knew he couldn’t stay with me.”
- Steve Prefontaine

“Dr. Loren Cordain, professor emeritus of health and exercise science, for one, thinks we should eat and live like our hunter-gatherer ancestors, whose meat-heavy diets gave them more muscle mass and enhanced their athletic abilities and performance. Robb Wolf, author, would add in weight training, stretching, and, in particular, cross-country running, because it challenges our bodies in the same ways hunter-gatherers had to navigate uneven terrain and the up-and-down of hills...all of which increased their physical robustness.”
- Devon Jackson

“American runners are cheated, not spoiled, by the dearth of authentic cross-country runs in the United States. It is not that we must make a tough sport even tougher to further distinguish it; it is that we must try at times to meet the world standard, which is one that blends imagination and intensity, making cross-country running an unforgettable experience.”
- Marc Bloom

“The senior men’s race was a shifting spectacle of weariness. This may be the hardest race in the world to win, pitting as it does the best runners from a variety of events: milers against marathoners, steeplechasers against 10,000 meter men. In no other kind of running is the strain so great. The toll of

constantly hauling oneself out of sand, over logs and away from surrender is eventually a certain blindness of will. The closest thing to it on the track is the steeplechase. But the cross-country world championship is four times as long.”

- Kenny Moore, 1972 US Olympic marathoner, Sports Illustrated writer

“The victory and the nature of the race confirmed more than anything else the validity of the Cross-Country Committee’s decision to maintain the IAAF cross-country championship as a team event. The fact that Eddy Van Mullem (Belgium), by finishing 51st out of 163 finishing runners assured the team prize for his country; the knowledge that if Mike McLeod (the sixth English finisher, in 43rd place), had finished a mere two seconds earlier in 35th place, then England would have won by five points--all this adds incentive for the athlete and a fascination for the team follower.”

- IAAF press release after Belgium’s three-point victory over England in the 1977 World Cross Country Championship

“You know, all you do on these trips is talk about past trips. Remember 1970 in Vichy? England won, naturally. We won every year from 1964 to 1972. But the celebration was the thing. Vichy’s revelries included sending a borrowed Peugeot over a bridge and into the river Allier. Lovely evening that was. It is always a week of seeing old enemies, a hard run and the year’s best bash after.”

- Dave Bedford, former 10,000 meter world record holder from England [speaking about the World Cross Country Championship]

“Man is incredibly adaptable, a creature of habit. War, jail, forced labor, everything can become everyday to

him. Just so can he be happy at kilometer six of a cross-country run. The tricks of the ground are more familiar now. Run way over on the left here; jump off at that spot there. Energy is better distributed. A rhythm is discovered. It all becomes just half as bad, no matter if one is overtaken or passes someone else.”
- Manfred Steffny, Olympic marathoner from West Germany

“The longer one runs, in terms of miles or years, the more one savors cross-country, to feel part of it. A morning run through an agricultural area, even if the same route is repeated for a year, evokes increasing involvement. Patterns of frost and fog, the growth and withering of grass, occasionally cataclysmic events such as lambing, induce an awareness of the land’s rhythms--the nearness of his own rhythms, of breath and heart and footfall--assure the runner of his place.”
- Kenny Moore

“In track, you face disqualification if you impede the progress of another runner. In road running, the tenor is good-natured. In cross-country, you must be aggressive, and that means dishing it out and taking it.”
- Marc Bloom

“The nationals are like nothing else. You have over 200 of the best Kenyans fighting like crazy, like a cavalry charge.”
- Patrick Sang (on the Kenyan National Cross-Country Championships)

“Women’s cross-country is both crowded and in. Five years ago, at the second AAU championships, there were 40 entrants. Last weekend there were 542. “It’s

like pierced ears," says one girl. "A few years ago only certain people did it. But now it's acceptable. Same with cross-country." They tell stories about these little girls. Like the 6-year-old who clotheslined anyone who tried to pass her. And the 9-year-old who got tired and started walking up a hill until she spotted a man with a camera, at which point she sprinted madly. And the 7-year-old who stopped in her tracks and started crying when someone passed her on the final straight. And the 4-year-old who was there, according to one official, "just to be exploited by her father. And it worked. He got his picture in all the papers."

- Skip Myslenski, Sports Illustrated, December 08, 1969

“The week before the championships it was business as usual for Doris Brown Heritage five miles in the morning around Seattle's Green Lake and over the hills of Woodland Park and, as always, each hill meant something. The first was for Francie Larrieu, whom she expected to be her toughest competition. The second was for Maria Gommers, the Dutch girl whom Brownie considers the best woman distance runner. And the third was "for me," she says. "I knew if I was going to win I had to work on that final climb.”

- Skip Myslenski, Sports Illustrated, December 08, 1969

“In football, you might get your bell rung, but you go in with the expectation that you might get hurt, and you hope to win and come out unscathed. As a distance runner, you know you're going to get your bell rung. Distance runners are experts at pain, discomfort, and fear. You're not coming away feeling good. It's a matter of how much pain you can deal with on those days. It's not a strategy. It's just a callusing of the mind and body to deal with discomfort. Any serious runner bounces back. That's the nature of their game. Taking pain.”

- Mark Wetmore

“Each cross-country course affects the runners laboring upon it, punishing most, rewarding the peculiar strengths of a few.”
- Bobby Fries

“Cross-country is a common meeting ground for all kinds of runners. Track racers move up to it. Road racers come down. These distances and terrain demand the combination of speed and strength that lets them compete equally.”
- Joe Henderson

“All my runners should train and race cross-country. It builds strength for any runner. Some runners, if they train for the 1500 meter, then they are afraid of running 12 kilometer cross-country races, but that is where the strength comes from. Every runner has speed, but you must train for endurance.”
- Mike Kosgei, Kenyan National Coach, 1985-1995

“In cross country, there are really no records. In cross country, every course is different; every course offers a challenge... bridges to cross, hills to climb. You just can't judge.”
- Steve Prefontaine

“Cross country running is excellent for developing strength. The terrain forces you to run with your whole body. Your leg strength will improve. Your stomach muscles will get stronger. Your core strength will be enhanced. You'll be compelled to pump your arms. And increasing your strength--one of the critical five S's--will help you run faster on the roads or on the track.”
- Julian Goater and Don Melvin

“In a sport that’s been mostly bleached of any messy subjectivity, cross country remains wonderfully untamed and unknowable.”
- Dennis Young, USTFCCCA

“Track and field is spectacular, but you can’t help knowing. ‘What’s his split?!’, the eternal refrain of the track fan or coach. No one cares about splits in cross country. It’s pretty difficult to know them accurately, or at least to observe them in real time. Speed ratings, polls, and past times remain pretty unhelpful in predicting races held on grass in the future, and that’s a beautiful blind spot. Cherish the one tiny slice of the running calendar left for Not-Knowing.”
- Dennis Young, USTFCCCA

“One of the big factors in wanting to join cross country in 7th grade was that we would be allowed to spend the entire night locked in our junior high tackling each other in the hallways as part of the end of the year celebration. In retrospect, it really wasn’t a decision based on flawed data because that is what we actually did, and that was as good as it got for me at the time.”
- Bob Kempainen, Olympic marathoner

“I was into hunting, fishing, trapping, anything to do with the outdoors, until finally, at about the age of 17, girls started looking pretty good to me-- but I was such a shy kid the thought of talking to a girl about made me sick to my stomach! I did notice that many of the guys who were good in sports would wear their high school letter jackets around school and had girls all around them, so I thought if I earned a letter jacket the girls would come to me. I went out for football and

got gang tackled the first day of practice. I remember getting up out of that pile of guys and thinking there wasn't a girl alive that was worth going through that. I walked off the field and quit! Best thing that ever happened to me. About a week later, I went out for the XC team. I was terrible but I hung in there and eventually made the varsity team when I was a senior.”
- Dick Beardsley, who placed a close second to Alberto Salazar at the 1982 Boston Marathon, in 2:08:53

“At 11 years of age they're all ordinary little girls. And that's how they are until they're 16; some are going forward, some are going back. Paula was never a southern champion at under-13 level, for instance. But it's often the good runners who make great runners, if you see what I mean. When they get to 15 or so, really, that's the nitty-gritty. She has never been pushed. Any pushing came from within. Her parents and her coaches encouraged her to make sure that she got her academic qualifications first. As for the running, they would see how it went. If she turned out to be really good, the decision would make itself.” Her first race at a national level came as a 12-year-old in 1986 when she placed 299th out of around 600 in the girls' race of the English Schools Cross Country Championships. She finished fourth in the same race one year later.”
- Alec Stanton (and "The Guardian") on Paula Radcliffe

“Of the three competitive disciplines in racing: track, road and cross country -- my first exposure, first love and last love will always be cross country. I don't know whether it's because I was born on a farm and love the country atmosphere, that the fall is my favorite time of year or that my stride was well-suited for such terrain. It just came naturally and I felt at home.”
- Craig Virgin

“Being a runner is never as easy as it looks, especially if the runner is a national champion. From diet to training regimen, being an elite athlete on a title team is a year-round affair. If complacency appears, others will rise to the occasion and take spots. There are no pep-talks, no coaches circle outlining what athletes need to do to maintain their standing; it is simply a matter of individual desire. Race times are what they are, but it takes more than just running to get better.”
- Andrew Haubner

“They have to get better in their training volume, they have to get better in their training intensity, they have to get better in their training consistency. They have to get better in how they eat and how they sleep and the choices they make at 9:30 on a Friday or a Saturday night. They have to keep ramping it up year after year after year. In Division I there is no room for weakness. If you sneeze, five people will go by you.”
- Mark Wetmore

“I loved cross country running. It was my favorite part of the whole sport. Cross country is a great training ground for young athletes. At my local school in Portland we now have 300 kids out of 1200 students who now do cross country. That’s one in four pupils and that’s unbelievable.”
- Alberto Salazar

“My very first cross country race. I had no idea what I was in for. I ended up winning in a sprint finish -- then passed out.”
- Lea Wallace