

SUBURBAN PAROCHIAL LEAGUE CROSS COUNTRY



RACE OPERATIONS

August 2026



Suburban Parochial League - Cross Country RACE OPERATIONS

Rules and cross country meet administration will conform to the standards published in *Track and Field and Cross Country Rules Book* as published by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), except where specified differently within these **Rules & Procedures**.

SECTION 1: COURSE / MEET MANAGEMENT

A. *Course Measurement*: To ensure accuracy, the host school(s) of each meet must measure all courses in one contiguous route. If the course is found to be longer or shorter than the given grade distance it should be indicated on the course map.

- Note: For the Championship Meet, the course must have an accurate distance for any record to be acknowledged and recorded.

B. *Course Markings*: Courses should be clearly marked with colored flags supplied by the League. The following flag colors will be used at all SPL Cross Country Meets:

RED = left turn

YELLOW = right turn

BLUE or **WHITE** = straight ahead

Runners are to run flag to flag, passing to the left side of the flag on right turns and to the right side of the flag on left turns or simply passing to the outside of the flag on turns.

If necessary, and when allowed by the owner of the venue, arrows or paint can be used to help clarify the course. In addition, when allowed by the venue owner, the course may be marked with a striper. If striping is to be done, white paint should be used to stripe. In addition to markings, spotters can also be used to direct runners through tricky parts of the course. However, flags are predominant means of marking a course and supersede any other markings.

C. *Race Distances / Time Limits*:

GRADE	RACE DISTANCE	MAXIMUM TIME
5	1.0	12 Minutes
6	1.5	18 Minutes
7-8	2.0	24 Minutes

- Race distances may be + / - 0.1 miles of the prescribed distance.
- The starter or meet manager should communicate these time limits to the meet's official timers. This procedure is meant to keep runners who are walking the course from holding up the meet.
- All races will be run based on grade and gender with staggered starts for girls and boys, with the girls running first, followed by the boys. The head starter will make the determination as to when to start a race, with input from the meet manager, host school and its volunteers, assuring one grade doesn't run over another and the chute is able to accommodate finishing runners.
- Where a course is run in loops, it is mandatory that all 6th grade courses have the smaller / shorter loop run first followed by the larger loop.

D. *Disqualification*: A competitor will be disqualified for:

- wearing an improper uniform, as determined by the starter;
- wearing prohibited shoes;
- intentionally interfering with another runner (vs. incidental contact) to include elbowing, pushing, blocking;
- for leaving the designated course to gain an advantage;
- failing to run on the outside of flags on turns;
- unsportsmanlike conduct to include inappropriate language or disrespect toward a meet official;
- Pacing;
- Being given aid / water while actively competing.

Pacing is defined as any athlete, coach, teammate, parent, or other person running alongside for a distance that is determined to aid or affect the racing of that runner. A few steps beside a runner in the process of coaching or cheering them on is NOT considered pacing. It is also not considered pacing for a coach to encourage the last runner in the race by running alongside for a short distance to encourage and help them finish the race.

If an athlete is in distress, injured or drops out of the race and is not actively competing, fluids or aid may be administered.

E. *Conflicts*: Should a conflict arise, the coach / parent / meet official should speak to the team's head coach regarding resolution of the problem causing the conflict. The head coach will then determine the necessary or appropriate action needed. If the conflict involves another school, both head coaches should discuss and determine the appropriate action and if necessary, involve the League President. Should the SPL President become involved, he/she will, after appropriate consultations with meet officials, other coaches, and the involved parties, shall have the authority to make a final decision to resolve the conflict.

F. *Coaches Conduct*: Coaches best serve the interest of their student-athletes, school, and the SPL CC by being positive role models of good sportsmanship. Coaches should avoid displays of anger and should not visibly or audibly protest decisions.

G. *Pets*: **NO** dogs, cats or other animals should be brought to the meet site due to liability and the messes left by pets. Coaches and athletic directors for member schools are responsible for communicating this rule to the parents, extended family members and friends (spectators). When a pet is brought to a meet site, coaches and/or meet officials should politely notify the pet owner of the League's rule (and most likely the owner of the meet site) and ask them to remove the pet. If the pet isn't removed in a timely manner, the head coach of the team to whom the pet owner is affiliated with should be notified and asked to resolve the matter. If not resolved by a coach, penalties and or disqualification of the team can be imposed.

H. *Cancellations*: Meets will only be canceled due to inclement weather or course conditions that present a hazard to the safety and well being of the competing athletes. The cancelation of any meet is subject to a vote of each competing team's head coach, after (a) reviewing on-going weather conditions or (b) advised of hazardous course conditions by the host school or meet management. Meets may be suspended for lightening in accordance with the League's lightening protocol and resumed when deemed safe to do so, waiting a minimum of 30 minutes after the last lightening strike. As of July 2018, the SPLCC has also adopted the IESA/IHSA Severe Weather Policy referenced in Section 9. With the approval of a majority of the head coaches and sufficient meet operations support the standard format of a meet may be altered to speed up completion of a meet before severe weather strikes.

The Suburban Parochial League requires all member schools / teams that choose to set up a tent to minimize the risk caused by team tents by following industry recommended steps for team tent safety.

- Tents should be set up no later than an hour prior to race time.
- Canopy weights should be 20 lbs for each leg of a 10' x 10' tent; 50 lbs. for a 10' x 20' tent.
- Additional use of stakes and guy lines is venue dependent and not sufficient without the use of canopy weights.

Examples of Good Canopy Weights

- Vertical sandbag weights that are specially made for securing canopies, meeting the above weight requirements, and strapped to the legs of the canopy.
- PVC pipe capped and filled with cement can be hung on the inside of canopy poles as long as it is secured so that it does not collide with athletes, coaches or spectators.
- Weights specifically designed for the canopy

Examples of BAD Canopy Weights

- Gallon water jugs are not heavy enough for large gusts of wind. One gallon of water weighs 8 pounds. One gallon of water on each corner would be the equivalent of a 3-year-old child trying to hold down a 100 square foot parachute.
- Tying tents or canopies to tables, coolers or vehicles provides tripping hazards and frequently does not provide adequate weight.
- Sandbags that cannot be placed upright and securely tied to the tent or canopy should not be used.
- **Never** use cement blocks! They are hard, easy to trip over, and are very effective toe and shin breakers.

Avoid stretched out cords and lines. Athletes, coaches, and spectators will get them wrapped around their arms or legs, causing them to trip and fall.

Weights and canopy tie-downs should be safely secured -- "safely," meaning that the method used to secure the canopy does not create its own safety hazards:

- Weights should not cause a tripping hazard.
- Weights that are tethered with lines should be clearly visible.
- Weights should have soft edges to avoid causing cuts and scrapes.
- Weights should be securely attached.
- Weights should be on the ground: **NOT above people's heads.**

Recreational tent canopy use is not recommended in sustained winds greater than 15mph or if significant gusts in excess of 20mph are experienced.

Penalties: Teams not adhering to these canopy tent safety guidelines will be asked to take their tent down. Failure to do so will result in a team's athletes being suspended from competition and disqualified from participating in that meet.

A. The meet manager of the host school will email all information (meet letter, course maps, parking arrangements, etc.) at least one week in advance of their scheduled meet. If a new course, measurement of the course to assure accurate distances of 1-mile, 1.5-miles and 2.0-miles should be completed.

B. A Meet Letter Template is available on the SPL website.

SECTION 4: COURSE SETUP

A. **Starting Boxes:** Where space permits, each starting box will have a width of six feet. If the course does not accommodate this size, the meet host will create equal-sized starting boxes for each team. Slower runners should be placed in the back of the box to help prevent falls at the start of the race.

B. *Finish Line / Chute / Corral:* The finish line should be at least 20' wide. A chute or corral should be used in accordance with scoring method needs, runner considerations, and the ability to award place finishers appropriately. A diagram is available on the SPL website and in NFHS documentation.

C. *Course Markings:* Courses should be clearly marked with colored flags supplied by the League. The following flag colors will be used at all SPL Cross Country Meets:

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SECTION 5: VOLUNTEERS

REFERENCE SPL WEBSITE FOR MOST UP TO DATE VOLUNTEER ROLES AND ASSIGNMENTS.

SECTION 6: RACE DAY TIMELINE

- A. *Course Walkthrough:* It is the responsibility of each school's coaches to ensure that their runners know the course. Any questions regarding the course should be directed to the meet host before the meet at the coaches' meeting. There will be no official walk through, although it is suggested that teams accompanied by their coaches walk their respective course as part of their meet preparation.
- B. *Coaches Meeting:* There will be a mandatory Coaches Meeting 45 minutes prior to the first race conducted by the League President and the meet manager of the host school. In addition, the meet manager for the next meet may also provide information about the upcoming meet.
- C. *Starting Line Report:* Runners should report to the starting line at least 15 minutes before the start of their race. School position on the starting line will be marked, determined by the perpetual starting list that was begun in 1992. The first school (team) on the list will be located at the far left side of the starting line, as you look out onto the course. The list/box locations will be shifted two schools each week. New member schools will be added to the bottom of the perpetual list as it stands at the time that the school joins the League.
- D. *Race Start Time:* The planned start time for the first race is 9:00AM or as required per the meet letter.
- E. *Race Order:* Races will be run in ascending grade order (5 – 6 – 7 – 8). Girls will run first, followed by the boys race.
- F. *Starter Considerations:* The starter **may** call a race back within the first 100 yards should a runner(s) fall, or it's determined that a false start occurred.

SECTION 7: SCORING

- A. *Scoring:* Boys' and girls' races will be scored separately, and teams must have a full 5-man team to qualify for team ribbons, except for the Championship meet Division awards where special rules apply. For team scores, the runner's finish place will equal the points scored for his/her team, with each team's first five runners' finish places added together. The lowest score wins, followed by the other teams with the lowest scores in order. In cross country a perfect score is 15; $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 = 15$.
- B. *Ties:* Ties will be broken by determining where a team's 6th place finisher has finished; the team with the lower 6th place finish will win the tiebreaker. (See NFHS Rules book for other examples of ties and their resolution.)
- C. *Individual Race Registration:* Meets are scored electronically with weekly participant registration via athletic.net.

SECTION 8: CHAMPIONSHIP MEET CONSIDERATIONS

The Championship Meet follows the same rules and guidelines as the regular season, except as noted in the SPL Rules and Regulations with regards to scoring / awards. Season dependent, a different scoring company may be used based on course requirements. Applicable administrative details will be put out in the Championship Meet letter to address differences.

SECTION 9: SEVER WEATHER POLICY

This Policy shall be in force for all SPL sanctioned and sponsored cross country and track & field meets.

- **Severe Weather Conditions:** When thunder is heard, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Take shelter immediately. Lightning is one of the most consistent and underrated causes of weather-related deaths or injury in the United States. Nearly all lightning-related injuries occur between the months of May and September and between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Therefore, the greatest concern for injuries in an outdoor contest appears to be during that time, though it can happen any time of year.

It is essential that host schools, competing schools, and contest officials establish dialogue in advance of the contest or event to ensure that all involved are aware of what the plan will be in determining whether or when to suspend play. Host schools are encouraged to share their plan with competing schools and officials prior to the start of the tournament.

- **Advance Planning:** Local Managers should have a documented plan in place, designated people who are responsible for monitoring the weather and a qualified person (typically a trained manager and/or officials) to make the decision to suspend play. In state series competitions, the host school administrator or official(s), if assigned, can make the decision to suspend play.
- **Monitoring Weather:** Local Managers during the contest should be aware of any potential thunderstorms that may form during the competition; if an evacuation is needed, managers should also know how long it would take teams to get to their safest location. Monitoring the weather with a weather alert radio, or with lightning detection systems, or any other available means, is recommended. If competing schools have portable devices they will be bringing to a contest and have specific policy or directions from their administration that they must follow, the school must communicate those policies with the host school. Host schools must know the policies of each school assigned to their tournament prior to its start.
- **Lightning Awareness:** Generally speaking, it is felt that anytime a cloud-to-ground strike of lightning can be seen, or thunder heard, risk is already present. It is time to seek shelter.
- **Criteria for Suspending Play:** If the local management does not have commercial weather warning equipment at the site or an efficient method of making an accurate, timely decision on location, listening for thunder is the best way to mitigate the danger. If thunder is heard, or lightning is seen hitting the ground, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike in your location. According to the National Weather Service, lightning can strike 10 miles away from the parent thunderstorm. When thunder roars, go indoors!

- It is important that local managers monitor not only how far away the lightning is but also how fast it is approaching. Thunderstorms can form and move quickly, and danger can arrive quickly. Either host school administration or assigned contest officials have the authority to suspend or cancel interscholastic contests. It is recommended that those groups work together in making such a determination and use any and all available information in doing so. Participating schools with concerns at particular events should direct those to the host school management or assigned contest official.

The following guidelines should be followed in determining when to suspend an event:

- Anytime a cloud-to-ground strike of lightning can be seen, or thunder heard, risk is present, and a contest should be suspended. ***At that point, the 30-minute rule for resumption will go into effect.***

Note: Due to the layout of some outdoor facilities, contest officials or tournament managers may not be able to see lightning actually "strike the ground." However, whenever lightning is seen moving out of clouds towards the ground, it can be assumed that the lightning is striking the ground somewhere, and as a result, the contest should be suspended. If lightning or thunder is not present but the weather is starting to become ominous, tournament management and/or contest officials should use all available information to determine if, and when a contest should be suspended. Care for both participants and spectators should be taken into account at this point. If in doubt, contest officials or tournament managers are encouraged to exercise caution and suspend play. Tournament officials should be ready to implement their emergency plans. However, competing schools that pull their teams or athletes off the field of competition prior to a contest or event suspension do so at the risk of forfeiture or disqualification from the game or event. Suspended contests or events should be resumed at a time when the weather and/or field conditions allow for resumption.

➤ Evacuation Plan

- **Safe Areas:** All personnel, athletes and spectators should be clearly informed of available safe structures or shelters in the event of an approaching thunderstorm. A safe structure is any fully enclosed building frequently used by people. In the absence of that - athletes and spectators should go to any vehicle with a hard metal roof. Roll up the windows and do not touch the sides of the vehicle. If no safe structure or vehicle is available, find a thick grove of small trees surrounded by taller trees or a dry ditch. Assume a crouched position on the ground with only the balls of your feet touching the ground. Wrap your arms around your knees and lower your head. Minimize contact to the ground since lightning often travels through the ground.

- **Avoid:** Tall trees or objects like light poles or flagpoles, individual trees, standing pools of water and open fields. Also avoid being the highest object on the field. Do not take shelter under trees. Avoid bathrooms if another building is available, and do not use a land-line telephone. A cellular phone or portable phone is a safe alternative if in a secure shelter or vehicle.

➤ Resuming Activity

- The NSSL (National Severe Storms Laboratory) recommends that everyone should wait at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning or sound of thunder before returning to the field or activity.

➤ Championship Meet Considerations

- If the race is stopped with the lead runner ***less than halfway*** through the course, then there will be a **one-hour** rest period. All runners will go back to the starting line and the race will start all over.
- If the race is stopped with the lead runner ***more than halfway*** through the course, then there will be a **two-hour** rest period. All runners will go back to the starting line and the race will start all over.
- If the majority of the runners have finished and the race has to be called because of bad weather, the results will stand if the last runners who have not finished do not affect the results of the top teams.
- If the race cannot be completed on the scheduled day, depending on the availability of the course and the agreement of a majority of the head coaches, then: (1) the race will be run on the Sunday or next available weekday following the canceled meet, subject to the respective archdiocese policy for athletic contests or (2) if the course is not available, a majority of head coaches can vote to cancel the meet and championships will be vacant for that season.