

Dear All

There have been cross-country leagues since the 1970s, e.g. Manchester League, Yorkshire League, Surrey League, Birmingham League, etc., but not in the 'minor' counties.

Then, in the mid-1980's, a running magazine called 'Today's Runner' decided to promote and sponsor cross country leagues, presumably hoping to increase the number of its readers.

You can still easily find many examples of these leagues, e.g. Southern League (formerly Hampshire Division), North Essex League, Kent Fitness League, Derby Runner League, as well as the OxMail, etc.

Southern League website - "Originally sponsored by Today's Runner magazine, the idea was that racing in the league should encourage friendly competition and ensure that everyone is able to participate in and enjoy the events. Although no longer sponsored by the magazine, the original spirit of the league still stands."

North Essex League website – "The league was first set up in the late 1980's. It was back then when the Today's Runner magazine set up XC leagues all around the country primarily aimed at what then was seen as "new wave" running (or "jogging") clubs which were created during the running boom. The previously existing XC leagues were at that time seen as elitist and not suitable for 'joggers'."

Kent Fitness League website – "originated in the late 1980's following an article in Today's Runner Magazine encouraging newcomers to the sport (a) to take up cross country running and (b) to join a running club. The aim was to encourage mass participation amongst men and women, excluding elite athletes from the competition, with the minimum amount of formality and organisation. A series of leagues were set up across the country with the winning teams taking part in a National final".

Derby Runner League website – "This league was once called the Today's Runner Cross Country League as it was sponsored by the now defunct magazine. Although the races can be competitive, they are fairly low-key events with a good friendly club atmosphere. The courses are usually proper cross country, so muddy and hilly. Results are usually finalised after the race in a nearby pub".

Oxfordshire League (extract from WHH Newsletter Autumn 1987) – "The new Oxfordshire (Today's Runner) XC League offers races for all age groups, male and female, including a 'fun' mixed event mini-minors (U11); in fact the aim is for a 'fun' approach to all these events, although I expect that once started, the competition will be as fierce as ever! The organizers come from the newly formed road-running clubs in the county – Witney, Yarnton, Eynsham, Kidlington, Abingdon".

I add a copy of the original rules at the bottom of this note.

Some of these leagues still follow the original rules; in particular, the exclusion of fast runners and mixed races, males and females together. However the Oxfordshire League started without these particular details. Nevertheless you can still see the roots of many of the current OxMail rules in the original text.

In fact, I would say that the Oxfordshire League has from the beginning covered the whole spectrum of runners – very few 'elite' ones, but many 'competitive' ones, as well as many runners for 'fun/fitness'.

The first 'Oxfordshire League' took place in season 1987-88. There were 5 rounds, November to March, as well as a separate County Championships. The hosts were Yarnton AC (now defunct?), Witney AC, Oxford City AC, Abingdon Amblers, and Kidlington RR.

In the second year, there were 6 rounds, October to March, as well as a separate County Champs. The hosts were White Horse AC, Yarnton AC, Oxford City AC, Witney AC, Abingdon Amblers, and Kidlington RR. 7 mens teams (White Horse, Abingdon, Witney, Kidlington, Banbury, Oxford City, Eynsham), and 5 ladies teams (Witney, Radley, Banbury, White Horse, Abingdon) completed the season.

In the third year, there were 5 rounds, November to March, as well as a separate County Champs. The hosts were Yarnton AC, Oxford City AC, Abingdon Amblers, White Horse AC, and Kidlington RR. 7

mens teams (Kidlington, White Horse, Witney, Banbury, Abingdon, Oxford City, Headington), and 6 ladies teams (Radley, Witney, Banbury, Oxford City, Kidlington, White Horse) completed the season.

The first appearance of the 'OxMail' logo that I can find was in February 1990, and from then on I think that the League became known as the OxMail League.

I did not run in 1987-88, having retired from 'serious' running in 1975; but I did run 'for fun' 4 times in 88-89 and 2 times in 89-90, and can still remember the early atmosphere and the venues.

The League started with 6 races and 200-300 runners per round. We have since separated the U11s boys and girls, added the junior girls U15/U17 (U15s previously with the U13s, and U17s with the ladies), and introduced the U9 (boys and girls together), and now have an average of 700 runners per round.

Frank Briscoe, 14/03/2015

Today's Runner Cross-country League Rules

The emphasis of the league is to provide the ordinary club member with the opportunity to participate in a series of multi-terrain events. The atmosphere is to be enjoyable and social without the outright 'cut and thrust' associated with specialist cross-country leagues.

- The guideline for speed is 5:30 minute mile pace for men and 6:00 minute mile pace for women.

This translates to:

- o 5 miles 27:30 men 30:00 women
- o 10 Km 34:11 men 37:17 women
- o 10 miles 55:00 men 60:00 women.

- Any runner who achieves this pace over a measured distance 5 miles or over during the 12 months prior to the first race is ineligible.
- In the last resort any runner who can be proved to have equalled or bettered this pace should be notified to the race organiser who will amend the race results as though that runner is disqualified. The raceorganiser will inform both the club concerned and the Divisional Coordinator of the revised result. [Comment: The implication of this rule is that the next scoring runner will count.]
- It was the wish of the meeting that all Clubs would ensure that their members were fully aware of these speed guidelines and Club Representatives would do their utmost to ensure no violations. If this is done then the race atmosphere should be as enjoyable and social as intended.
- A team to comprise the first 5 scoring men and the first 3 scoring women.
- If a gender has at least one member, the missing members will be given a score 1 greater than the last finisher in the gender race. [Comment: The implication of this rule is that every gender team with at least one runner will achieve a score for the overall race.]
- An incomplete gender team with more runners than another incomplete gender team will be ranked higher regardless of score. [Comment: The meeting considered that this rule would provide an incentive to Clubs unable to field complete teams to enter more runners.]
- The men and women will be scored separately and the overall result determined by summing the resultant placing, e.g. Men finish 2nd and women finish 4th results in $2+4 = 6$ points. The aim is that the men and women will have equal weighting in the calculation of the overall result. In the event of a tie in the men's or women's race 'count-back' will be used to resolve the tie. (The position of the final scoring runner will decide the team position).
- A full team to win over an incomplete team (men, women and overall). In the event of a tie in the end of series positions then aggregate score will be taken into account to resolve the tie. [Comment: The implication of this rule is that points alone will not determine the overall result.]
- Young runners may participate subject to the rules of UK Athletics regarding maximum distance permissible. Due regard needs to be taken of the requirements of the Insurance in place and of the Race Permit. Individual Clubs are responsible for their own young runners.
- Only runners eligible for teams are allowed to run in the race, i.e. no guest runners and no members running as individuals.
- All runners must wear their Club's strip.
- The race is to start at 11.00.
- The poorest overall result of each Club would not count in the calculation for the end of series overall result.
- The preference is for events of around 8k over a multi-terrain course. Host Clubs should attempt to meet this guideline if possible.
- Host Clubs may wish to record the times of the 1st 10 finishers and of the leading women for inclusion in the results reported to the media.
- Host Clubs may wish to display a distance to go notice towards the end of the course.
- Runners are prohibited from running with dogs or with portable music players for reasons of safety.