

HELENA XC

2026 STUDENT-ATHLETE HANDBOOK

COACHES AND CONTACT INFO

GIRLS

HEAD COACH

Jesse Zentz, 406-422-3039
jzentz@helenaschools.org

ASSISTANTS

Taylor Floming, 303-325-4802
Sarah Perry, 319-432-2112

2026 CAPTAINS

Isa Ward, senior
Kortney McKay, senior
Ellie Coburn, senior
Mary Clement, senior
Harper Johnson, junior
Alexa Pipinich, junior

BOYS

HEAD COACH

Kelley Gilbert, 406-916-7634
kgilbert76@charter.net

ASSISTANTS

Mike Kauffman, 406-431-6124
Nate Wellington, 916-591-8506

2026 CAPTAINS

Milo Kauffman, senior
Joel Melton, senior
Dan Williams, senior

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Website: www.helenahighxc.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/hhsbengalsxc

Instagram: @hhsbengalsxc

2026 SCHEDULE

- **Friday, Aug. 28:** 12 p.m., Billings Invitational, Amend Park, Billings
Bus leave time from HHS at 6 a.m.
- **Friday, Sept. 4:** 11 a.m., Flathead Invitational, Rebecca Farms, Kalispell
Bus leave time from HHS at 5 a.m.
- **Saturday, Sept. 12:** 4 p.m., Bozeman Invitational, Bridger Creek Golf Course
Bus leave time from HHS at 12 p.m.
- **Saturday, Sept. 19:** 9:30 a.m., Mountain West Classic, UM Golf Course
Bus leave time from HHS at 6 a.m.
- **Thursday, Sept. 24:** 12 p.m., Butte Invitational, Highland Golf Course
Bus leave time from HHS at 9:30 a.m.
- **Friday, Oct. 2:** 3 p.m., Great Falls Invitational, Anaconda Hills Golf Course
Bus leave time from HHS at 12 p.m.
- **Thursday, Oct. 8:** 12 p.m., Capital City 7 vs. 7, Bill Roberts Golf Course
Release at 10 a.m.; JV arrive by 10:30 a.m., Varsity by 11:30 a.m.
- **Wednesday, Oct. 14:** 4 p.m., Helena Area Showdown, Bill Roberts Golf Course
Release at 2 p.m.; arrive by 2:30 p.m.
- **Saturday, Oct. 24:** State Championship, Amend Park, Billings
AA Girls race at 11:30 a.m. and AA Boys race at 12:30 p.m.
Bus leave time 9:30 a.m. Friday, Oct. 23

GENERAL GEAR NEEDED

1. **Running shoes:** You should ideally have two pairs you can rotate. (Shoe guide, Page 12)
2. **Watch:** Does not have to be GPS. A simple digital watch is enough.
3. **Athletic gear:** Wear clothing appropriate for running; ask for help if needed.
4. **Personal Water Bottle:** Make sure it's full and with you whenever possible.
5. **XC Racing Spikes:** These are strongly recommended; ask a coach for help.

COMPETITION PACKING LIST

Please wear your uniform (jersey and shorts) on the bus under your HELENA XC warm-up gear. You must wear running shoes on the bus and off the bus.

- Racing spikes
- Extra clothing: socks, underpants, shorts, t-shirt, rain jacket, hat, gloves
- Sack breakfast or lunch; and dinner money
- Water bottle (we will bring water for refills), electrolyte drink, snacks
- Phone, earbuds (optional)
- Pillow, small blanket (optional)

WHO WE ARE

3 PROGRAM PILLARS

1. **EXCELLENCE:** Deliver your greatness every day.
2. **CURIOSITY:** Be open minded.
3. **LOVE:** Be a good teammate.

7 SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES

- B - Be Responsible & Reliable** = I make things happen and I can be counted on.
- E - Elevate The Pack** = How can I help my team? me vs. me WITH you vs. you.
- N - Never Stop Exploring** = Seek (process oriented) vs. show (outcome oriented).
- G - Give Your Best** = Focus on what you're going to do, not what's might happen.
- A - Appreciate The Opportunity** = Exhibit an attitude of gratitude.
- L - Lead With Heart** = Model authenticity, compassion, connection, vulnerability.
- S - Set The Standard** = Strengthen the mind/body through work & recovery.

COMMITMENT

All members of the team and a parent are **required to review and sign** our commitment form prior to the state of the season to participate. It will be distributed separately and included as the final two pages of this handbook.

COMMUNICATION

We use **GroupMe** to communicate with athletes and will update parents with a weekly email, unless we need to connect directly via text. You can text/call coaches at the numbers above as well, always starting with the head coach. Don't assume your coaches know what you're thinking or feeling. Help us, help you.

CHAMPIONING THE FUN

Cross country is a hard sport by nature. If you're part of this team, it means you're a special kind of person — and your teammates are, too. We choose to do things most people would call a little crazy. But even with all the miles and the work we put in, having fun matters.

Fun looks different for everyone. For some, it's competing well. For others, it's hanging out at pre-meet team meals. For another group, it's pushing themselves in training and discovering they're capable of more than they thought. For many, it's celebrating team success. And for others, it's contributing to the program in ways that go beyond race results.

Our expectation is that every athlete recognizes the value of each person equally and shows respect for the program and for one another. We do that by modeling our pillars and principles and by meeting the standards of our shared commitment.

HPS CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

In accordance with Helena Public Schools policy (Student-Parent Handbook), once you become a member of this team, you have made a choice to uphold certain standards expected of Helena Public Schools activity participants:

1. The use of vulgar or profane language is unacceptable.
2. The coach of each activity shall set the standard for game or activity day dress.
3. Students are expected to exhibit appropriate behavior at all times.
4. Students are expected to be supportive of all team/activity members, coaches, and officials before, during and after an event.
5. Students are expected to follow all rules and regulations of the school as well as any specific rules and regulations adopted by the activity sponsors or coaches.
6. Students who engage in misconduct off of school property or outside of the school day may be subject to discipline by school authorities under certain circumstances. One of those circumstances is when students choose to participate in extra or co-curricular activities. In addition to the Student Code of Conduct in the individual building Student Handbooks, all students who voluntarily participate in District sponsored activity agree to abide by this Athletic Code of Conduct throughout the year in which the student participates in the activity. The Code is not a complete list of unacceptable conduct by students. HPS student athletes/activity participants are considered to be role models and expected to act accordingly during their high school career.
7. Any student athlete/activity participant whose conduct is found to be a discredit or to cause unfavorable notoriety to the athlete/activity participant, team or the Helena Public Schools and which results in a suspension shall be subject to non-participation in the sport or activity for the length of the suspension as determined by the Principal or Assistant Principal.

CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLE

1. **ATTITUDE** – Everything starts and ends with attitude. A positive, winning attitude helps you succeed and impact those around you.
2. **EFFORT** – How hard you work is up to you and no one else.
3. **FOCUS** – Focus is relaxed concentration. Your focus must be on the here and now in training and competition.
4. **PREPARATION** – The work you put into your physical and mental training and recovery will affect your ability to make a positive impact.
5. **REST** – Sleep enhances performance and recovery. You need 8-10 hours per night to function your best in the classroom, in training, and in competition.
6. **NUTRITION/HYDRATION** – It is important to fuel your body for success. No matter how big your engine is, it won't function without a full tank of fuel.
7. **COACHABILITY** – Your ability to receive, accept, and apply input from coaches will play a key role in your growth. Keep an open mind and accept challenges.
8. **HONESTY** – Choosing to be honest is truly the best policy and it helps build trust. It fosters better relationships with others and with yourself.
9. **COMMUNICATION** – Positive, sincere, assertive, and clear communication with your coaches and teammates will give you and your team an edge.
10. **BODY LANGUAGE** – How you carry yourself is contagious and can lift or sink a team. Be aware of how your body language affects those around you.

Varsity Selection

Varsity runners are determined by the coaching staff prior to each competition based on time, placing, completion of workouts, and adherence to core values, supporting principles, attendance, and expectations. Coaches can run a minimum of 5 varsity runners or a max of 7. Varsity selection is at the coaches' discretion.

Girls Letter Requirements

A runner may letter at Helena High by meeting any of the following requirements.

Varsity Letter (Must achieve at least one of the five options below)

1. Run at one of the courses during the season in 21:30 or faster, whether in varsity or junior varsity competition.
2. Score (top five on the team) as a member of the varsity team in any varsity competition where more than 3 teams compete and in which Helena High places first or second as a team.
3. Finish in the top 4 in a dual meet, top 6 in a triangular meet, top 8 in a quadrangular meet and so ... adding two places for each additional team entered. This can be done in varsity competition only.
4. While participating in the JV division, post a better performance (time) than the fifth Helena High varsity finisher at the same meet.
5. Make the state team, consisting of the top 7 student-athletes at the end of the season. The alternate(s) also may achieve a letter at the discretion of the head coach.

Commitment Letter

Discretionary letter from coaching staff for seniors completing fourth full season. Completing four years in the program DOES NOT guarantee a letter. Coaches also reserve the right to award a discretionary letter for reasons not outlined here.

Earning a letter, it is presumed, is one of the goals of participation in athletics. Be reminded, however, that receiving an award is not guaranteed solely by meeting one of the criteria above. If a student-athlete fails to complete the season or fails to conduct herself by the rules and expectations presented by the Helena School District or this program in particular, she will not receive an award. The award winners are officially announced at the end of the cross country season.

Letters are awarded at the discretion of the head coach.

BOYS LETTER REQUIREMENTS

A runner may letter at Helena High by meeting any of the following requirements.

Varsity Letter (Must achieve at least one of the five options below)

1. Run at one of the courses during the season in 17:10 or faster, whether in varsity or junior varsity competition.
2. Finish in the top 4 in a dual meet, top 6 in a triangular meet, top 8 in a quadrangular meet and so ... adding two places for each additional team entered. This can be done in varsity competition only.
3. Score (top five on the team) as a member of the varsity team in any varsity competition where more than 3 teams compete and in which Helena High places first or second as a team.
4. Make the state team, consisting of the top 7 student-athletes at the end of the season. The alternate(s) also may achieve a letter at the discretion of the head coach.

Earning a letter, it is presumed, is one of the goals of participation in athletics. Be reminded, however, that receiving an award is not guaranteed solely by meeting one of the criteria above. If a student-athlete fails to complete the season or fails to conduct himself by the rules and expectations presented by the Helena School District or this program in particular, he will not receive an award. The award winners are officially announced at the end of the cross country season. Also, it is not a guarantee that an athlete will letter once he completes 4 years of running on the jayvee level or if they are named a captain.

Letters are awarded at the discretion of the head coach.

AWARDS

These awards are based on a combination of performance and coaches' discretion. Winners must be in good academic and disciplinary standing and must model Helena High cross country team pillars and principles.

- **Most Valuable Bengal**
- **Most Improved Veteran**
- **Rookie of the Year**
- **Most Improved Rookie**
- **Excellence Award**
- **Curiosity Award**
- **Love Award**
- **Linda Paull Heart Award**
- **Bill Gilbert Legacy Award**
- **Coaches' Awards** (multiple)
- **Team Captains** (multiple)

STUDENT–ATHLETE & PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMITMENT FORM

Being part of Helena Cross Country is a choice and a privilege – and with that comes responsibility. This program is built on three pillars: **Excellence, Curiosity, and Love**. When you join, you represent the program in everything you do. It is also important for participants to recognize this is a varsity sport where all students are welcome, but all participants must strive to meet expectations and standards of behavior presented in this commitment.

PROGRAM VALUES & CULTURE

Athletes agree to:

- Live out our pillars – give your best, remain open-minded, be a great teammate.
- Help create a positive and welcoming team culture.
- Represent Helena High with integrity at school, practice, meets, online, and in the community.

Parents/Guardians agree to: Support our values and expectations of the program.

CONDUCT, CITIZENSHIP & SAFETY

Athletes agree to:

- Demonstrate sportsmanship in what you say and what you do.
- Make choices that reflect well on you, teammates, and Helena High.
- Avoid behavior and conduct that violates school policy or degrades team culture.
- Follow all HPS chemical-use rules.
- Never participate in hazing, bullying, or harassment, and report it to a coach if you witness it.
- Report unsafe behavior and communicate injuries honestly.

Parents/guardians agree to: Model sportsmanship and follow HPS communication guidelines.

RESPECT FOR TEAMMATES & COACHES

Athletes agree to:

- Listen when others speak.
- Follow instructions the first time.
- Treat teammates and coaches with kindness and respect.
- Hold teammates accountable if they are not demonstrating kindness or respect.
- Trust coaches' expertise and their obligation to do what is best for the team.

Parents/guardians agree to: Support coaching decisions and model respectful communication.

ATTENDANCE & PRACTICE EXPECTATIONS

Athletes agree to:

- Attend all practices, required team events, and meets unless excused ahead of time, including weekend practices when we don't have a competition scheduled.
- Arrive on time – Mon: 2:50-2:55 p.m.; Tues-Fri: 3:20–3:25 p.m.; Sat: 8:50-8:55 a.m.
- Understand that unexcused absences or chronic tardiness may affect meet entries and travel.
- Follow all travel procedures, bus rules, and gear expectations.

Parents/guardians agree to: Request excusals from scheduled team events in advance by contacting a coach directly via text or email. Failure to communicate will result in an "unexcused" absence.

ACADEMICS

Athletes agree to:

- Prioritize academics and communicate proactively with teachers and coaches.
- Attend class to attend practice and competitions.

Parents/guardians agree to: Support their athlete in maintaining academic eligibility.

COMMUNICATION

Athletes agree to:

- Communicate honestly about academic needs, injuries, illness, or concerns.
- Use team communication apps responsibly and check them regularly to stay informed.

Parents/guardians agree to:

- Follow the HSD communication chain (Athlete/Parent → Coach → Helena High Administrator → HSD Activities Director). This is provided in detail in the [HSD Student/Parent Activities Handbook](#).
- Communicate proactively about absences, illness, injuries, or concerns.

EQUIPMENT & PREPARATION

Athletes agree to:

- Bring appropriate gear daily (Backpack with water bottle, snack, jacket, spikes, etc.)
- Wear Helena High XC gear at meets as directed by coaches.
- Take care of team-issued equipment and return it undamaged, clean, and promptly after the season; each missing or damaged item incurs a \$50 charge processed through the HHS office.

Parents/guardians agree to: Support gear needs for your athlete (shoes, shorts, shirts, socks, watches, water bottles) and encourage proper uniform and backpack care and return. Contact a coach for confidential assistance if you do not have financial means to purchase key items and we can assist.

COMMITMENT

By signing below, the athlete and parents/guardians acknowledge failure to meet the expectations and standards of behavior outlined in this document may result in a warning, suspension or expulsion from the team, using the framework below:

- **Level 1 Violations**
 - **Examples:** tardiness, unexcused absence, disruptive behavior, first-time failure to follow instructions.
 - **Consequences:** verbal warning and possible parent notification.
- **Level 2 Violations**
 - **Examples:** misuse of communication apps, disrespect toward teammates/coaches, repeated Level 1 violations.
 - **Consequences:** practice suspension and/or competition suspension, and parent meeting.
- **Level 3 Violations**
 - **Examples:** bullying or harassment, hazing, unsafe behavior, dishonesty/lying, threats to others, fighting, conduct harming team or school reputation, repeated Level 2 violations.
 - **Consequences:** parent meeting, extended suspension, loss of lettering eligibility, removal from travel team, referral to school administration, potential expulsion from the team.
- **Academic and Chemical Use Violations**
 - Consequences will follow Helena Public Schools policies and procedures.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Coaches have discretion to upgrade disciplinary measures outlined above based on the severity of actions of an individual.

Student-Athlete Name: _____

Student-Athlete Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____