**Conditioning Exercises for Cross Country**

*These are my standard exercises that I teach to almost everyone I train. You might also recognize many of your physical therapy exercises! Use them in your workouts and use your imagination when playing around with them. Always focus on form above repetitions and sets. Listen to your body; 3 good ones are better than 20 bad ones. The sets and repetitions are suggestions for an intermediate level fitness and should be adjusted accordingly. Err on the side of caution and do fewer to start.*

*You can create a strength circuit by choosing 5-8 exercises and doing them all in one session. Make sure you do all the exercises at some point during the week.*

*For a running workout use the Drill/Stride workout described near the bottom.*

**Injury Prevention Exercises**

Penguin or Funny Walks: Injury prevention exercise. Lower leg and foot conditioning. Walk forward and backward about 15ft or can be done standing in one place. Toes pointed out on tiptoes, feet turned out on heels, on tiptoe with toes pointed inward, on heels toes pointed in.

Heel Raise and Lower: Similar to funny walks but standing in one place. Lift heels to stand on tiptoes, hold for 3-4sec then slowly lower. 2 sets of 8-10reps.

Monster Walks: Feet hip width apart. Squat like going to sit in chair. Walk forward heel toe for 20 steps. Go backwards toe to heel for 20 steps. Hands on hips or pretend you are carrying a very large, heavy ball in front of you

Crab Walks: Similar to Monster Walks but take small steps to one side for about 20 steps. Reverse direction. Hands on hips.

Lateral Leg Lifts (standing): Injury prevention exercise. Stand on one leg lift other leg out to the side. 10 reps then hold up for 10 more seconds at the end of the last rep. 2x both legs.

Clocks: Injury prevention exercise. Stand on one leg and extend other leg touching points of the “clock” on the ground in an arc e.g. 12, 1, 3, 5, 6 repeat on other side 12, 10, 9, 7, 6

**Dynamic Drills**

Lateral Shuffle: Semi-squat position, keeping hips low shuffle sideways for 20m run back and lead with opposite side. 2x lead both sides.

Russian Kicks: Straight leg march touch opposite hand to toe. 2x20m

Open/Close the Gate: forward and backward. 2x20m

Butt Kickers: emphasize light and quick 2x20m

Fast Feet: small fast steps, pump arms to increase cadence, quiet with no scuffing. 2x20m

Skipping: Low skip, “happy” skip (arms), high skip (emphasize vertical) 2x20m each

Cradles: Grab ankle/foot of one leg as you pull it up and across the slightly bent knee of your other leg like you are going to sit down with your leg crossed. Should feel a stretch in your glute/hip of the leg you are pulling up.

“Blades of Glory”: Stand tall and with arms in natural running position drive one knee up pull toes of that foot towards shin then hinge forward at the hips so torso is parallel with the ground and swing that leg back like you are kicking something behind you. Move arms in coordination like you are running or you can reach towards the ground. Reverse the movement and step forward and repeat with other leg. This requires balance and coordination. 8-10reps on each side.

**Core/Hip/Leg Strength**

Squats: Feet hip width apart. Lower yourself down to a sitting position by pushing your hips back and keeping your knees pointed straight or slightly out and above your toes, you should be able to see tips of your toes. 90 deg angle between lower and upper leg. Stand back up pressing down through the heels and feel your glutes engage as you stand by squeezing them. Try holding the squat position for 2-3 sec before standing up. 2x10-20 reps

Box Jumps: Load by moving into a squat position. Explode upward using arms for momentum and extending legs. Soft Landing onto your mid/rear foot while absorbing by bending knees back into squat position. This is an advanced move and you should begin with a 6” step before progressing to higher jumps. 2-3x6-8 reps

Elbow Plank/Arm March: Elbow plank position to start. Hold this position for time. Challenge: balance on one elbow and one foot by lifting one arm and one leg. Hold for a few seconds and then alternate. 1-3 sets of 4-8 reps

Russian Twist: sitting with knees bent and upper body at 45 deg angle back. Touch floor on either side by rotating upper body, hold a medicine ball or light weight for added challenge. 8-10 touches both sides. 2-3 sets

Hip Hinges: Sit on floor similar to Russian Twist. Lift heels 6” off the floor and then lightly tapping them down. Keep hands by your side palms on floor. Lift from your hips and not by bending your knees. Challenge: cross arms across chest instead of on floor. 2-3 sets of 8-10reps.

Push Ups: Lower your body to the floor so your elbows bend as close to 90 deg as possible before pushing back up. Vary the placement of your hands to work slightly different muscles. You can modify the position by touching knees to the floor instead of feet. 3-5 sets of 3-10 reps.

Chair Dips: Using a chair or bench lower your body so your elbows are bent at about 90deg. Knees can be bent or legs straight out. 2-3 sets of 6-10 reps

“Scooter or Claw”: Running efficiency drill. Stand on one leg. Lift other leg so thigh is parallel to the ground lower leg hanging straight down, toe pulled up toward shin. Let leg drop and sweep the leg back like pushing off on a razor scooter. Emphasize back kick and lift the heel upward toward glutes like buttkicker drill. Hold arms in running position and coordinate with leg swing just like running. Make the movement swift/smooth. 5x each leg, rest 10 sec. and repeat. 2-3 sets on each leg.

Dead Bug: On your back, legs and arms extended, lift shoulders off the ground alternate slowly reaching hand to opposite foot.

Supermans: On your belly. Lift extended arms and legs off the ground like you are flying. Hold for 2x30sec.

Pointer Dog: Start in Table Top (all fours) position. Brace core muscles and lift left arm and extend hand straight out in line with the spine as if pointing while lifting right leg and extending behind also in line with the spine. Alternate. 2x Hold for 20-30sec to start and progress to 4x60sec.

Planks (hands/elbows): Feet hip width apart. Hold the plank for 30 sec rest 10 repeat up to 3x. Challenge: Alternate lifting one leg at a time for 3sec.

Mountain Climbers: Start in hand plank position. Keep hips stable and resist using an up and down motion w/hips. Alternate extending one leg at a time with other knee to chest.

T-Stab: Start in plank position. Rotate torso to one side and extend arm straight up towards sky forming a “T” with your upper body. Bring arm back down and rotate other side. Feet stay hip width apart.

Side Plank (hand/elbow): position hand/elbow directly beneath shoulder. Raise hip while maintaining a strong, long line from head to feet. Legs can be stacked or staggered. Progress the movement by raising the top leg in a lateral lift.

Hip Bridge: On your back, knees bent, hands by side. Lift hips off ground and hold for time or do repetitions. 2-3 sets 8-10 reps. Challenge: Single Leg Extension

Leg Thrusters: 4 different exercises combined into one set. 1) squats 2) alternating reverse lunges 3) alternating split jumps 4) squat jumps. Do 8-10 of each exercise, 3-4 sets. Rest 30-60 sec between sets

**Example Drill/Stride Workout:**

Set up Start and End cones 20-30m apart for the drill zone. Stride zone 30-40m long (the stride zone immediately follows the drill zone). Execute the drill in the first zone then run fast (stride) the second zone where indicated. Full recovery, this is not interval work.

Russian Kicks. Jog back easy, no stride.

Open/Close Gate. Jog back easy, no stride.

Skip Drills. Low, Happy, High. Stride out at the end of each. Jog back.

Side shuffle 2x switch lead leg. Stride out. Jog back.

Carioca or Grapevines 2x switch lead leg. Stride out. Jog back.

Butt Kickers. Stride out. Jog back.

Fast Feet. Stride out. Jog back.

Finish with Airplane Strides: build your speed in the stride zone hitting 80% of max and then easing off. Emphasize smooth acceleration and good running form i.e. light, fast quiet feet, fast arms, level head. 4-8x60-80m