

Review of NZSSAA Cross Country Distances for Girls and Boys

Earlier this year NZSSAA Executive received a request from a group of Senior Girl cross country runners to remove gender differences in the distances run at our championships. They are also seeking to have similar changes made to their regional cross country championships. Executive have responded to their request by undertaking a survey of opinion from athletes, coaches, team managers and parents as to the interest in making changes to achieve gender equity in our events.

The main points of their letter were as follows: *We recently competed in the CSW Wellington Individual Cross Country Championships at Harcourt Park on Wednesday 30th May. We were surprised to see that the senior boys race was 6km while the senior girls race was only 4km. The intermediate boys race was also 4km long while the intermediate girls race was 3km. Can you please explain to us why there is this difference?*

We believe that girls are just as capable of the endurance required for long distance running and we spoke to many girls from other schools who also agreed. In most other CSW sport competitions such as athletics and swimming, males and females race the same distances. A girls football game is the same length as a boys game and at the New Zealand Senior Club Cross Country Championships the men's and women's races are the same distances.

We recently contacted College Sport Wellington about this issue and they say this is something they are aware of and have raised with you as the National body. They say that they will look at their own approach to this for next year's events.

As Chairman of NZSSAA Executive I responded to them with the main points being as follows: *College Sport Wellington emailed me recently about this and I will copy my response to give you some of the background to where we are at the moment. It's not meant to be a defence in favour of maintaining the status quo because, like you, I think girls and women are perfectly capable of training for and running the same distances as boys and men.*

Our event distances align with the Athletics NZ under 18 grades. Although our age groups go to Under 20 the majority of our senior runners are Under 18. There is a tendency to take in to account that the majority of those running are relatively inexperienced cross country runners and therefore to go for a shorter rather than longer distance. As a matter of interest at the ISF World XC champs the girls ran 3.5 kms and the boys 5.5kms so we are not really different from what happens internationally.

In the past we have been concerned with the lower number of girls, particularly senior girls competing and have thought that going out to 6kms would be a disincentive to entering. There is no doubt that girls who are trained runners can cope with 6kms but would there be a fall-off in participation from those who are more casual runners, often coming from other sports in order to make up a team?

The survey has 3 options for people to consider: make no change; have girls run the distances the boys do now; change the distances for junior girls, senior girls and senior boys so that they are the same for each age division, Year 9 3km, Junior 4km, Senior 5km. We would ask team managers to share the link

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JJYP76K> with as many interested people as possible in order to get significant numbers responding. The survey link is also on our website www.nzssaa.org.nz and Facebook page.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the issues and respond via the survey.

John Tylden

Chairman NZSSAA