

2019 OCRS MILE PACE TARGETS

As 2019 was the first season where OCRS Pace Targets (PT's) were available, the data showing how well they worked is limited. There were some very impressive results however, but before digging into them a quick review might be helpful.

PT's are an athlete's mile* split times, customized to his or her individual current fitness level, calculated to cumulatively produce the selected overall time/performance, up to and including the best performance that athlete is capable of on that course, based on the difficulty rating for the entire course and the difficulty factors within each mile.

Athletes and coaches can request their PT's at various paces to produce a specific overall time up to and including their current ultimate achievable goal performance. They might use them as a practice workout or competition strategy to learn how it feels to best use their energy on the selected course.

Below you will see the PT's that athletes and coaches could have received from OCRS, to produce the times they actually ran in races. Let's see how close (or not) their target mile splits came to their actual splits.

Take for example, the target vs. actual mile splits for the boys overall winner who ran 15:53 in the Fork Union Cross Country Invitational on 9/21/19. If he had requested them, the OCRS targeted paces for miles 1, 2, 3, and last .11 mi to cumulatively produce that 15:53 would have been 5:05, 5:07, 5:08, and :33 respectively. His actual mile and last .11 mile splits that day on that course were 5:05, 5:07, 5:05, and :34. His team mate, who finished second in that race in 15:56 would have received target splits of 5:06, 5:08, 5:09, and :34. His actual splits were 5:04, 5:06, 5:10, and :36.

There were other similarly close target to actual split times. The overall winner of the Foot Locker boys championship race at Balboa Park on 12/14/19 ran a 15:08 on that tough San Diego course. His PT's if requested to produce that time there would have been 4:51, 4:52, 4:53, and :32. His actual splits were 4:48, 4:55, 4:54, and :31. The second place girl at the same championship race on that course ran a 16:46 and would have received target paces of 5:22, 5:24, 5:25, and :35 to produce that time. She actually ran 5:17, 5:30, 5:24, and :35.

In both boys and girls races throughout the season similar patterns were observed. Many of the top 30% of a field actually ran close to the OCRS PT's, some of them almost exactly matched them. Most of the bottom 70% in a field did not. In fact, the farther away from the top finishers runners were, the greater the disparity between their target and actual splits. Another almost universal pattern even among the top runners seems to be that in **NO** cases did any athlete go out slower than their first mile OCR target pace. The legendary coach and running researcher, Jack Daniels, frequently cites this regrettable but predictable mistake saying, "they all go out too fast.....the winner just dies less than the rest".

Just look at the first to last time spread in the above mentioned boy's championship race at the first mile4 seconds! The spread at the finish was 99 seconds! The first mile spread in the girls race was 29, and 195 at the finish!

There were examples of runners who were apparently aware of this #1 mistake in cross country. Two girls in that same 12/14/19 championship race showed impressive pace savvy. The number 19th overall finisher for example, who was 38th of 40 at the 1/2 mile mark, and who came through the mile in 30th place, continued to march past 12 more runners during the rest of the race. She obviously knew something about pacing and displayed the same

discipline two weeks earlier in her FL South qualifying race at Mc Alpine where she was 16 seconds behind the leader at the mile in 27th place but then passed 17 runners in the next 2.11 miles to finish 10th and earn a trip to San Diego. Another runner who showed pace awareness, also a FL South region qualifier was the #8 finisher in San Diego, coming through the half mile in 33rd place out of 40 but who then passed 25 girls on her way to a top ten finish. Her Mc Alpine Park to Balboa Park PEQ was 17:42 her actual time at nationals was 17:32. And while that is impressive, look at her target to actual mile splits and see if you think she could have done even better. Her OCRS target mile times to produce her 17:32 would have been 5:37, 5:39, 5:39, and :37. Her actual mile splits were 5:24, 5:47, 5:44, and :37. It is still early in the collection of Pace Target data, but OCRS believes that had she been even more conservative with her pace at mile 1, and not gone out 13 seconds faster than her first mile target she probably would have been more able to hit those 2nd and 3rd mil targets, probably even beaten them. In any case this young runner and/or coach apparently understands the importance of realistic pacing even if she missed the first mile by a little more than she should.

There were examples of just the opposite. Take the 20th place girls finisher in San Diego running an 18:03 on the Balboa Park course. Two weeks earlier she was the 3rd place finisher also at Mc Alpine Park with a time of 17:04 which is the performance equivalent of a 17:40 at Balboa Park. At nationals she was the #1 runner at the half mile and 34 seconds faster at the mile than her PT's would have targeted for her had she requested them. In the remaining 2.11 miles she got passed by 19 girls. Had she used OCRS Pace Targets to help her avoid going out so unrealistically fast and actually run a 17:40 PEQ in San Diego, she would have placed in the top 12 at least.

Again, it is early in the Pace Target game, but clearly there are at least two big issues going on:

1. As Jack Daniels said, "they all go out too fast". The question is how fast is too fast? OCRS believes the data to this point suggests that even among the top performers who's target to actual times are the closest, if they are 7 or more seconds faster than their PT's at the first mile they will suffer a pace penalty thereafter. Actual times seem to confirm this.
2. No one wants to look bad at the mile. In championship races especially, the athletes are motivated, rested, in the best shape of the season, and running perhaps for the first time in the season against other runners equally good or better than they are.....a formula for disaster! Just glance at those mile 1 and finish spread times again. Who is going to be disciplined and confident enough in their race pacing strategy to come through the mile 5 or more seconds **behind** last place?

Both questions can be answered by using OCRS Pace Targets multiple times in practice and workouts with multiple paces on OCRS Pace Target ready courses (see website). After proving that they work in practice and workouts, and learning what it feels like to run courses at the most energy efficient paces customized to an individual athlete's fitness, the confidence will be there. Pace Targets can help any athlete at any performance level and can be the difference between disappointment and success.

* PT's are being offered currently only on mile segment lengths. PT's per kilometer and other selected segment lengths will be available soon.