

2026 NCAA Cross Country Preseason Rankings: XC-SPI Top 25

XC-SPI / The Caso Index

Colin C. Caso

Oklahoma State University

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Abstract

This article presents the Week 0 XC-SPI men's and women's Top 25. The preseason statistic is the XC-SPI Preseason Score, an auditable roster-adjusted scoring index anchored to the 2025 NCAA Championship and reconciled with public 2026 roster evidence. Lower values are better. Preseason Score is not a literal prediction of the final NCAA score and is not the fitted in-season model.

1. How to Read Week 0

The ranking starts from athlete-level 2025 NCAA evidence, moves verified transfers with the athlete, removes verified departures, shrinks uncertain roster cases toward a conservative replacement value, and applies a small Depth Risk. Current coaches' polls are not inputs. The evidence cutoff is August 28, 2026.^{1;2}

2. Men's Top 25

Table 1: Men's 2026 Week 0 XC-SPI ranking. Lower Preseason Score is better.

Rank	Team	Preseason Score	2025 NCAA	2025 score
1	Iowa State	167.3	3	158
2	New Mexico	271.6	2	82
3	Alabama	277.9	6	253
4	Oklahoma State	291.9	1	57
5	Colorado	330.6	10	318
6	BYU	391.0	11	336
7	Wake Forest	424.9	12	407
8	Louisville	481.2	26	584
9	Oregon	482.7	5	239
10	Washington State	513.2	17	491
11	Eastern Kentucky	533.4	9	316
12	Notre Dame	547.3	13	459
13	Michigan State	553.0	23	547
14	Virginia Tech	553.8	14	472
15	Northern Arizona	561.4	8	303
16	Wisconsin	589.2	19	514
17	Tulane	606.5	21	536
18	Ole Miss	611.1	22	538
19	Syracuse	621.8	4	212
20	Arkansas	623.9	18	498
21	Butler	651.6	16	484
22	Oklahoma	706.0	15	480
23	Virginia	719.8	7	303
24	Georgia	772.8	24	562
25	Princeton	797.8	27	598

3. Women's Top 25

Table 2: Women's 2026 Week 0 XC-SPI ranking. Lower Preseason Score is better.

Rank	Team	Preseason Score	2025 NCAA	2025 score
1	NC State	124.4	1	114
2	BYU	234.4	2	130
3	Iowa State	308.7	20	491
4	New Mexico	335.3	4	216
5	West Virginia	350.7	9	280
6	Oregon	395.6	3	153
7	Alabama	396.9	16	460
8	Stanford	442.1	6	268
9	Notre Dame	473.0	7	278
10	Northern Arizona	502.3	8	279
11	Colorado	521.5	13	434
12	South Carolina	539.4	15	456
13	Utah	547.7	17	465
14	Virginia	548.3	24	558
15	Northwestern	554.5	18	469
16	Florida	558.5	5	225
17	North Carolina	598.4	11	413
18	Arkansas	643.2	—	—
19	Villanova	647.1	25	574
20	Wisconsin	650.3	26	600
21	Oklahoma State	661.3	12	432
22	LSU	697.4	23	530
23	Penn State	757.5	10	406
24	Georgetown	765.3	14	454
25	Washington	803.0	19	472

4. The Biggest Preseason Decisions

Iowa State men rank first because the current roster carries five NCAA-proven values without using a replacement-prior athlete in the scoring five. New Mexico remains second despite Habtom Samuel turning professional because the program reports that the bulk of the runner-up production returns. Oklahoma State falls from the 2025 title to fourth in this prior because two members of the championship scoring five are identified as graduating seniors.^{3;4;6}

NC State women are first because the defending champion combines demonstrated scoring with unusual continuity and the addition of Rachel Forsyth. Iowa State women rise from 20th because the roster directly addresses the scoring positions that made the 2025 total balloon.^{2;4;5}

5. Postmodern Era Historical Success

The Power Ranking above is not forced to answer every forecasting question. XC-SPI now adds a separate **Historical Success Model** using the project-defined **Postmodern Era (Super-Shoe Era onward)**, 2020 forward.³¹ It uses 2020–2024 NCAA scoring profiles to estimate how often similar profiles finished as champion, podium (1st–4th), or top 10 one season later in 2021–2025. The disrupted 2020 championship is flagged and removed in a sensitivity rerun. Historical Success is ordered by podium rate because podium is less sparse than the title outcome. The Preseason Score ranking itself is unchanged.

5.1. Men's Historical Success Top 10

Hist.	Power	Team	Title	Podium	Top 10
1	1	Iowa State	30.1%	65.9%	84.5%
2	2	New Mexico	21.0%	47.6%	73.3%
3	3	Alabama	8.9%	39.1%	68.0%
4	4	Oklahoma State	7.5%	32.6%	58.3%
5	5	Colorado	9.8%	30.1%	63.0%
6	7	Wake Forest	6.0%	28.3%	54.5%
7	6	BYU	4.6%	22.1%	52.1%
8	8	Louisville	4.3%	19.8%	46.0%
9	9	Oregon	4.0%	17.9%	43.9%
10	10	Washington State	2.8%	16.9%	40.4%

Iowa State and New Mexico remain first and second historically. Colorado is fifth in the Power Ranking but carries the third-highest raw historical title rate, illustrating why current central strength and historical conversion need not produce identical ordering.

5.2. Women's Historical Success Top 10

Hist.	Power	Team	Title	Podium	Top 10
1	1	NC State	25.9%	68.6%	88.1%
2	2	BYU	9.6%	49.7%	79.1%
3	5	West Virginia	10.2%	38.2%	66.5%
4	4	New Mexico	7.3%	29.2%	62.5%
5	6	Oregon	6.0%	21.7%	47.3%
6	8	Stanford	5.3%	20.0%	45.4%
7	9	Notre Dame	5.1%	19.9%	45.2%
8	18	Arkansas	5.2%	18.6%	41.0%
9	16	Florida	4.3%	18.2%	43.0%
10	3	Iowa State	2.5%	15.4%	38.9%

The women's historical layer moves more. NC State remains first; Iowa State is third in the Power Ranking but tenth in Historical Success because the current audited profile is much stronger at the front than at scorer five. That result is a historical risk signal, not a revision of Iowa State's Preseason Score.

The companion *Postmodern Era Historical Success Model* report publishes all 25 teams, the model-selection checks, COVID-season sensitivity, and Top-25-conditional Historical Title Odds.

6. Individual Title Watch

Men. Favorite: Rocky Hansen. Primary contenders: Brian Musau, Denis Kipngetich, Solomon Kipchoge. Contenders: Dismus Lokira, Robin Kwemoi Bera, Evans Kurui, Elsingi Kipruto. These are evidence tiers, not model probabilities.^{1;24}

Women. Co-favorites: Doris Lemngole and Jane Hedengren. Primary contenders: Riley Chamberlain, Hannah Gapes, Grace Hartman, Isca Chelangat, Betty Kipkore, Pamela Kosgei. Track-driven contender: Mercyline Kirwa. No current numerical title probability is published before the athlete-level championship model passes historical calibration. The earlier v2.5 Week 0 scenario board is deprecated.^{1;24}

7. What Comes Next

Once 2026 racing begins, Preseason Score becomes the starting information state rather than the weekly score. Historical Success remains a benchmark rather than a weekly power score. Race results will update athlete ability after distance, course, weather, ground, and race-wide context are estimated. The common NCAA field will then be simulated and scored under NCAA cross country rules. The technical specification and calculation appendices expose that process separately.

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