

# XC-SPI Frequently Asked Questions

Plain-language answers about rankings, Preseason Score, rosters, odds, and weekly updates

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## Abstract

This FAQ answers the questions most likely to arise when readers encounter the XC-SPI rankings, championship probability/fair-price framework, or technical documentation for the first time.

### 1. Why isn't the defending champion automatically No. 1?

Because the preseason ranking asks about the current roster, not who deserved the trophy last November. Oklahoma State's 2025 men's title remains a historical fact; a 2026 prior must also account for departures, transfers, returning scorers, and unresolved depth.

### 2. What is Preseason Score?

Preseason Score means **XC-SPI Preseason Score**. It is the Week 0 team-strength index. The model shrinks historical athlete evidence toward a conservative replacement baseline according to current evidence confidence, selects the five best adjusted contributions, and adds a small Depth Risk. Lower is better.

### 3. Is Preseason Score a predicted NCAA score?

No. A Preseason Score of 167.3 does not mean the model predicts 167 championship points. It is an index on a scoring-like scale used to order preseason team profiles.

### 4. Why is lower better?

NCAA cross-country team scoring is lower-is-better: first place contributes fewer points than 50th place, and the five scoring positions are summed. XC-SPI's Week 0 index preserves that direction. NCAA scoring rules are applied before the model interprets a team result.<sup>1</sup>

### 5. Why can't you just rank teams by raw 8K/10K times?

Cross-country courses are not interchangeable. Distance, terrain, altitude, weather, mud, field composition, and race tactics can make the same raw time mean very different things. The in-season model is designed to separate athlete ability from race context rather than treating every stopwatch reading as directly comparable.

## 6. What happens when a runner transfers?

The athlete's historical evidence moves with the athlete. The former school does not retain credit for a runner who is no longer there. The destination school receives the athlete's relevant prior evidence subject to the same evidence and comparability rules.

## 7. What happens with freshmen/newcomers?

If a newcomer lacks directly comparable NCAA cross-country evidence, XC-SPI uses a conservative common prior rather than inventing an athlete-specific NCAA finish. Track credentials can inform later modeling, but they are not mechanically converted into an XC place.

## 8. How do you know whether somebody is actually racing?

Often, in August, we do not. A current roster is evidence of membership, not proof of a championship lineup. Early-meet absence is not automatically interpreted as injury. The preseason Confidence weights exist because public information is incomplete; they are shrinkage rules, not availability probabilities.

## 9. Are the Confidence weights probabilities?

No. The 0.99/0.85/0.70/0 launch values are rule-based Confidence weights in the Preseason Score audit. They should not be quoted as "an 85% chance this athlete races."

## 10. Why include sixth and seventh runners?

Five score, but the sixth and seventh runners are meaningful insurance and can displace opponents. XC-SPI's small Week 0 Depth Risk penalizes a team whose next options sit far behind scorer five. It is not an estimate of actual NCAA displacement points.

## 11. How are individual qualifiers handled?

For team-scoring comparisons, the model distinguishes raw overall place from NCAA team-scoring-sequence position. An individual qualifier can finish 20th overall but correspond to a different hypothetical team-scoring value after the NCAA scoring filter is applied.

## 12. What is the Postmodern Era?

XC-SPI uses **Postmodern Era (Super-Shoe Era onward)** for 2020 forward.<sup>10</sup> It is a project-defined comparison window, not a claim that the sport changed for only one reason. The disrupted 2020 season is flagged and removed in a sensitivity rerun.

## 13. Why can Historical Success rank teams differently from the Power Ranking?

The Power Ranking uses current 2026 roster strength. Historical Success also asks whether that strength is front-loaded, back-loaded, or protected by depth, because similar Postmodern Era scoring shapes have not all converted to later NCAA success at the same rate. Neither ranking automatically overrides the other.

#### 14. Are the Historical Title Odds real betting odds?

They are betting-style **historical fair prices**, not sportsbook quotes and not the final current-athlete XC-SPI Championship Odds. Raw Historical Title rates are normalized across the displayed Top 25 so the title shares sum to 100%. The board is therefore Top-25 conditional and should be read as a historical benchmark.

#### 15. Where are the full current XC-SPI title odds?

They remain gated. Full Championship Odds require the athlete-level simulator, current availability/selection, race adjustment, exact NCAA scoring, and probability validation. The old Preseason Score-to-lognormal shortcut remains retired.

#### 16. Why run millions of simulations?

Many simulations reduce random Monte Carlo noise in the calculated probability. They do not eliminate uncertainty about the model assumptions. Monte Carlo is a way to propagate a model, not a certificate that the model is correct.<sup>5</sup>

#### 17. What does “calibrated” mean?

If a model repeatedly gives events about 20% probability, roughly 20% of those events should occur over a suitable sample. Calibration is a repeated-forecast property, not a judgment about one favorite winning or losing.<sup>3;4</sup>

#### 18. How will you know whether XC-SPI is good?

The validation plan separates several questions: Does it rank teams well? Does it predict team place/score reasonably? Do its probabilities calibrate? Does it beat simpler baselines? Are results stable when a variable family is removed? No single metric answers all of those.

#### 19. When will rankings update?

Once the season begins, weekly releases are designed to use a fixed evidence cutoff. New race results, roster information, and source corrections after that cutoff move into the next release. The Version History records methodological or data corrections.

#### 20. Can the rankings change a lot after one race?

They can if the race provides strong new evidence about athletes or roster structure, but the planned hierarchical/state-space model is intended to avoid treating one noisy performance as the entire truth. Repeated and higher-quality evidence should carry more influence than a single unusual result.<sup>7;9</sup>

## 21. Can I reuse the ranking table?

Yes, with clear attribution, subject to the Citation & Reuse Guide and any third-party rights attached to a specific image. If you modify the table, label it as an adaptation rather than an official XC-SPI release.

## 22. Where should I start if I want to audit everything?

Read the Technical Specification, Data & Evidence Standards, Data Dictionary, Team Calculation Appendix, Source & Evidence Register, and Historical Validation & Backtesting Plan. The Reader's Guide maps the full library.

## References

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- [10] Caso CC. *XC-SPI Postmodern Era Historical Success Model: Super-Shoe Era onward, 2020–2025 team-profile persistence, 2026 success rates, and historical title odds*. Oklahoma State University; 2026.