XC-SPI Reader's Guide

Where to start, what each publication does, and how to interpret the 2026 project

Colin C. Caso

Oklahoma State University

August 28, 2026

Abstract

The XC-SPI public library is intentionally more detailed than a typical ranking page. This reader's guide explains which document to open for a particular question, how the Week 0 preseason release differs from the in-season model, and which claims are descriptive, model-based, provisional, or not yet validated. It is the recommended first document for readers encountering the project for the first time.

1. The Short Version

XC-SPI is a roster-aware statistical framework for NCAA Division I cross country. The public project now has three distinct analytical layers. The 2026 Week 0 **Preseason Score** ranks current roster strength. The **Postmodern Era Historical Success Model** asks what similar 2020-forward NCAA scoring profiles became one season later. The planned in-season system will update current athlete strength using race results, race context, and NCAA scoring simulation. These layers are not forced to rank teams identically.

Reader note. If you only want the ranking, open *2026 Preseason Rankings*. If you want to understand why a team is ranked where it is, open the *Preseason Full Report*. If you want to reproduce every Week 0 number, open the *Team Calculation Appendix*.

2. Choose a Document by Question

Table 1: Which XC-SPI document should I read?

Question	Best document
What are the current Top 25 teams?	**2026 Preseason Rankings**. The shortest authoritative ranking record.
What are the main 2026 stories?	**2026 Season Preview**. Narrative context, roster turnover, defending champions, and individual-title storylines.
Why is Team X ranked here?	**2026 Preseason Full Report**. Team notes, assumptions, ranking logic, and model status.
How was Team X's exact Preseason Score calculated?	**Team Calculation Appendix**. Athlete inputs, Confidence weights, adjusted contributions, scorer-five subtotal, and Depth Risk.
What does Preseason Score mean?	**Formula & Statistics Guide** or **How XC-SPI Works**.
I barely know statistics. Where do I begin?	**Method at a Glance**, then the **Formula & Statistics Guide**.
What does each field/variable mean?	**Data Dictionary & Variable Guide**.

Table 1: Which XC-SPI document should I read? (continued)

Question	Best document
Where did the roster/result evidence come from?	**Source & Evidence Register** and **Data & Evidence Standards**.
What can the model get wrong?	**Model Limitations & Responsible Interpretation**.
What are the historical odds?	**Postmodern Era Historical Success Model** and **Historical Success & Championship Odds Framework**.
How will full current probabilities become odds?	**Historical Success & Championship Odds Framework**, then the limitations statement.
How will probabilities eventually be judged?	**Historical Validation & Backtesting Plan**.
What changed between releases?	**Version History & Change Log**.
How should I cite or reuse a table?	**Citation & Reuse Guide**.
I have a quick question.	**XC-SPI FAQ**.

3. Five Different Kinds of Numbers

The library uses several numbers that should not be treated as interchangeable.

1. **Observed results** are historical facts, such as a 2025 NCAA finish or score. The 2025 championship results are sourced from TFRRS and governed by NCAA scoring rules.[1;2]
2. **Preseason Score values** are Week 0 index values. Lower is better. They are not predicted NCAA points and are not probabilities.
3. **Historical Success rates** describe what Postmodern Era teams with similar profiles did one season later. Historical Title Odds are Top-25 conditional and are not the final current-athlete forecast.
4. **Deprecated v2.5 scenario probabilities** remain only as an archived methodological record.
5. **Future calibrated current probabilities** will be released only after the historical backtest and rolling validation gates described in the technical documentation are passed. Proper scoring rules and calibration will matter more than whether the top-ranked team happens to win one race.[3;4]

4. What Week 0 Can and Cannot Know

Week 0 occurs before the season provides direct 2026 cross-country evidence. Public rosters can be incomplete; eligibility labels can be ambiguous; early absences are not reliable injury evidence; and newcomers may have excellent track credentials without directly comparable NCAA cross-country scoring evidence. The preseason system therefore emphasizes provenance and transparent uncertainty rather than pretending these unknowns do not exist.

The Week 0 release should be read as a disciplined starting position: it records what the public evidence supports as of the cutoff and preserves the assumptions needed to reproduce that position later. It does not claim to know a championship lineup in August.

5. What Changes Once Racing Begins

The in-season project is designed to become more data-driven each week. New race evidence updates athlete strength; repeated venue evidence helps estimate course effects; race-day weather and ground information contextualize performance; and roster information becomes less speculative as teams actually compete. The weekly release will preserve a fixed cutoff so that a Monday ranking cannot silently change when a roster page is edited on Wednesday.

6. Why Power and History Can Disagree

The Power Ranking asks who looks strongest now. Historical Success asks what similar Postmodern Era profiles tended to become. A team can rank higher historically because its front-to-back scoring shape has produced a better floor or title conversion, or lower historically because its current strength is unusually concentrated in the first few runners. The disagreement is information rather than a number that should be averaged away.

7. A Good Reading Order

For a nontechnical reader: *Reader's Guide → Method at a Glance → Preseason Rankings → Season Preview → Formula & Statistics Guide.*

For a technical reader: *Technical Specification → Data & Evidence Standards → Data Dictionary → Calculation Appendix → Validation & Backtesting Plan.*

For someone evaluating the betting material: *Preseason Championship Odds → Model Limitations & Responsible Interpretation → Formula & Statistics Guide.*

8. One Principle to Keep in Mind

The purpose of the statistical layer is not to flatten cross country into decimals. It is to make the assumptions underneath a ranking visible enough that a reader can disagree with them, reproduce them, and later test whether they worked.

References

[1] National Collegiate Athletic Association. Cross Country and Track and Field Playing Rules. Accessed August 28, 2026. https://www.ncaa.org/championships/playing-rules/cross-country-track-and-field-playing-rules/

[2] TFRRS. NCAA Division I Cross Country Championships. November 22, 2025. Gans Creek Cross Country Course, Columbia, Missouri. Accessed August 28, 2026. https://www.tfrrs.org/results/xc/27301/NCAA_Division_I_Cross_Country_Championships

[3] Brier GW. Verification of forecasts expressed in terms of probability. *Mon Weather Rev.* 1950;78(1):1–3. doi:10.1175/1520-0493(1950)078<0001:VOFEIT>2.0.CO;2.

[4] Gneiting T, Raftery AE. Strictly proper scoring rules, prediction, and estimation. *J Am Stat Assoc.* 2007;102(477):359–378. doi:10.1198/016214506000001437.

[5] Metropolis N, Ulam S. The Monte Carlo method. *J Am Stat Assoc.* 1949;44(247):335–341. doi:10.1080/01621459.1949.10483310.

[6] Kelly JL Jr. A new interpretation of information rate. *Bell Syst Tech J.* 1956;35(4):917–926. doi:10.1002/j.1538-7305.1956.tb03809.x.

[7] Gelman A, Hill J. *Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models.* Cambridge University Press; 2007.

[8] Wood SN. *Generalized Additive Models: An Introduction With R.* 2nd ed. Chapman & Hall/CRC; 2017.

[9] Durbin J, Koopman SJ. *Time Series Analysis by State Space Methods.* 2nd ed. Oxford University Press; 2012.

[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.