

Hitting their stride

SLUH shows it has strong final kick with impressive district, sectional showings

By Joe Harris
Staff writer

There are no shortcuts to cross country success, but the St. Louis University High squad has taken even more of a scenic route than usual.

CROSS COUNTRY

Adversity has been nothing new to the Jr. Billikens this season. The team has had to overcome such a rash of injuries and bad luck that coach Jim Linhares, normally used to his team having success, really wasn't sure where his team was heading into districts.

But like most great runners, the Jr. Bills seem to have one heck of a final kick. They won the Class 4 District 3 title over conference foes Chaminade, DeSmet and CBC. The week before, SLUH struggled to a third place finish against those same schools in its conference meet.

The success continued Saturday during sectionals at Sioux Passage Park in North County. SLUH finished second with 81 points, just one point behind CBC on a water-logged course.

"This is getting close to what I expected," Linhares said. "Now we have three guys who are not just barely below 17 minutes, but they are way under 17. Now we have several guys running in the low 17's."

SLUH's team success was more than enough to qualify it for this weekend's state meet. The Jr. Bills will send their top seven runners - senior Andrew Linhares, junior Dan Meier, sophomore Ben Murphy-Baum, senior Chris Arb, junior Joe Carlson, senior Dan Flanagan and junior Alex Muntges, who is a question mark because he is nursing a hamstring injury.

Meier and Murphy-Baum have come to symbolize what this season has been like for SLUH.

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Jim Linhares
SLUH coach

Neither figured to be in the mix early on, but both answered the call when the Jr. Bills' top runners went down.

"This has been a year of guys stepping up and learning how to fill shoes," Linhares said. "That is how good runners are made on teams."

Linhares, Meier and Murphy-Baum shined Saturday despite the rainy conditions. The trio finished in the top 10 overall. Meier set the pace running a 16:43, while Murphy-Baum (16:47) and Linhares (16:49) were close behind.

The strong showing gives the trio big expectations heading into the state meet.

"When you have guys running in the top 10 in the sectional, they have to set a goal to make all-state (a top 25 finish)," Linhares said. "So I think they'll be going for it."

As for state, Linhares said it is impossible to tell. The quality of competition especially from squads like Ft. Zumwalt South,

SLUH

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West Plains, Liberty, Rockhurst, Columbia Hickman, Jefferson City, Chaminade, DeSmet, CBC and Parkway South make for a loaded field.

Linhares said the SLUH contingent will not try anything new this week in practice.

"I like our guys' attitude," Linhares said. "I think they know that there is still room to grow. I don't think we have peaked, there's still a way to go."

LINDBERGH struggled in its sectional Saturday at Jefferson Barracks.

The Flyers could not follow up the team success it had in districts, finishing seventh. Parkway South, Fox, Kirkwood and Marquette all

advanced their teams to state.

Lindbergh did qualify two runners individually in senior Steve Bender and junior Greg Shattgen.

Bender finished 10th in 17:12 in just his second year of running. Lindbergh coach Jim Peterson said he put in a lot of work over the summer to get where he is.

"He's got a natural ability to run," Peterson said. "He went out for track his sophomore year and I begged him to come out for cross country. He did

and the rest is history."

Shattgen had to deal with some adversity on his way to state. He finished 25th in 17:36.

"Greg has worked really hard this year," Peterson said. "He's battled through some injuries and we're happy to get him to state."

"We've pretty much done all the training," Peterson said. "We'll work on speed this week, we've got the endurance down. It's pretty much mental at this point."

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