

SPORTS

Cross country teams impress at FPXC; take home top five spot for each team

MITCHELL BOOHER AND
PETER LABARGE
REPORTERS

Long before the sun had risen last Saturday morning, cross country head coach Joe Porter roamed the Forest Park Cross Country Festival course with a headlamp on, making final preparations for the day ahead. Seven hours later, the XC Bills lined up on that same course, but they were there to race. And race they did, taking third place in varsity, fifth in JV, and third in the freshman race. The extremely competitive Festival featured over 300 teams and over 3,000 runners from across 11 states.

The 14th annual Forest Park Cross Country Festival was a success not only because of the strong races from the Jr. Billikens, but also because of how smoothly the meet went for host SLUH. From the first open 5K to the last middle school 3K, every race ran on time, and this year's festival was not marked by cold, heavy rains and mudslides on downhills, just a sunny sky and a warm 80 degree temperature. Porter, who along with the assistant coaches spent 31 hours cutting grass, lining courses, filling holes with mulch, and driving spikes into the ground, could not have been happier with the outcome.

"Saturday was a resounding success. In the end, the meet is a fundraiser and all that work gets put back into the team in what we are able to do," said Porter.

As for the team specifically, well, the runners came to work. First up, the top seven raced in the Green varsity division (the fastest and most competitive of the day), and out of the 25 fastest teams at the meet, SLUH missed out on first place by just two points, finishing third after losing the second place tiebreaker.

Starting from the gun, the entire team jumped to the near front, and through one mile, just 18 seconds separated seniors Lucas Rackers and Peter Dillon (the team's first and seventh runners), with Rackers and senior Noah Scott staying right in the middle of the lead pack of eight.

Even through two miles, the front portion of the race was littered with fleur de lis as the ever-present one to five gap was a mere 35 seconds, with Rackers still inside the top ten at seventh and Scott not far behind at tenth as they came up planetarium hill.

In the last 1400 meters of the race, though, the heat got to Rackers, who dropped back in the medalists, but Scott (8th, 16:35) moved through and closed to carry the torch as the first scorer for the day, while Rackers (22nd, 16:56) still had a strong showing to medal and grab another low score for the team.

"Finishing order isn't really

important," said Scott. "When some guys aren't having a day, another guy will always step up. I was really impressed with how everybody competed at every level even though the conditions were not necessarily ideal."

Next across the line were senior Adam Mittendorf (34th, 17:10) and sophomore Grant Brawley (36th, 17:10), who ran a particularly strong race to catch Mittendorf and motivate him to kick at the very end. The two crossed within tenths of a second of each other.

"(Grant) really pushed me finish strong," said Mittendorf. "He woke me up and kept me moving through the line."

Junior Daniel Hogan (47th, 17:18) pushed himself to the finish not even ten seconds later to close the scoring five's gap to only 43 seconds. Dillon (68th, 17:51) sprinted to the finish, throwing up as he came down the straight away half a minute later as what would turn out to be the crucial sixth man.

"I knew I had to keep

event of a tie, the sixth runner's place is added to the scoring five, and the lowest combined score wins the tiebreaker. Both SLUH and Neuqua Valley had a score of 142, but, sadly, the tie went to the Wildcats as their sixth man (45th, 17:18) beat out Dillon to take the silver. It was a race of tenths of seconds, and this time, the Jr. Bills just barely lost out, though according to Porter, that does not faze them one bit.

"I've never cared where we're placing on week two," said Porter. "Some of these teams have raced four or five times, we're just getting into our rhythm. Being the fastest team in the state in September doesn't raise banners. It's the November races that I'm thinking about."

In the JV race, a team marred with injuries and missing guys, stepped up and proved its depth. One notable addition to the roster was the return of senior Joe Callahan, who that morning decided he was ready to race.



SLUH runners at starting line of FPXC photo | Mrs. Kathy Choat

pushing through for the team as I came through the finish. I felt like I was going to be sick but I knew I had to keep going," said Dillon. "Porter emphasized that we should take risks so that we do not have any regrets from the race, and that is what I went out there and did."

Junior Hayden Zenor (75th, 17:57) finished soon after Dillon to close out the race for the Jr. Bills. After that, all they could do was wait.

And wait they did, as it took nearly half an hour for final results to be loaded online by Big River Race Management. This delay was due to an extremely close podium. As it turned out, Liberty, a Class 4 rival out of Kansas City, had taken the race out from under SLUH by a two-point razor-thin margin, one that could only be beaten by the battle for second.

Similar to last year's battle for second, which ended in a one-point victory over Rockhurst, SLUH was in the fight, but this time it was a tie between the Jr. Bills and the Wildcats of defending FPXC champion Neuqua Valley, an Illinois powerhouse.

In cross country, in the

ning the 3K later that day and senior Mitchell Booher out with a foot injury, the depth of this squad showed. Senior Sirius Song (44th, 19:03) stepped up to score fourth for SLUH, even negative splitting his last mile to gain extra places, and sophomore Joe LaBarge (51st, 19:08) closed out the scoring five.

"As a senior in the JV race I just tried to move up throughout the race and push the younger guys on the team as much as I could, especially towards the end," said Song. "And I think I did better than I thought I would in this regard."

A strong effort in the tough Green division earned the team fifth place of 18 teams, an improvement on last year's sixth.

Last on the docket for the day was the freshman 3K, and the rookies ran a stellar team race, as the first four were within a second of each other at the line and the fifth man was not far off. Carter Lowe (12th, 11:08), Wyatt Seal (13th, 11:08), Tim Greiner (14th, 11:09), and Nolan Meara (15th, 11:09) all finished in a race between each other, and Will Riggins (20, 11:22) finalized a 74 point score. Sixth man Nick Purschki (28th, 11:32) rounded out the medalists for the C team.

In team scores, Neuqua Valley once again reigned over the Jr. Bills, but it was Kickapoo who dominated to take home the win.

Though the team did not have the resounding success it hoped to have in the meet, the performances showed many promising signs and reiterated the importance of being the best team in November. A strong race from the freshmen proved the potential that the Jr. Bills have and strong performances in the JV race despite injuries proved the depth the Jr. Bills have as well.

The Jr. Bills look to continue to improve and test their work on the course this Saturday at the Paul Enke Invitational at Sioux Passage. Because some of the top runners will be making the trip to Chicago for the Palatine Invitational the following weekend, varsity runners will be held out this weekend from the meet, hoping to keep them fresh for Palatine. Instead, SLUH will run a V2, where the top JV runners will step into the varsity spotlight.

The V2, JV, and freshman runners will battle on what is one of the most difficult courses in Missouri, known for its treacherous hills such as Man Maker, Confidence Breaker, and Rollercoaster. Just as the Jr. Bills have their eyes up to the top of the hills this weekend, the team looks forward to the middle season of meets where there fitness and work will begin to show.

Football unable to respond to De Smet's offensive firepower; falls to 1-2

BY BLAKE OBERT AND LUKE
ALTIER
SPORTS EDITOR, STAFF

Having already lost to a tough team in Ladue, SLUH's schedule is continuing to get tougher, and they expect to play a top team in the country in CBC in the coming weeks. Last week held to this theme, as they played against a powerhouse in De Smet Jesuit. The game ended with an injury-plagued SLUH team scoring once in a 49-7 loss. But, even though SLUH lost to De Smet by quite a bit, they still fought through each quarter and stuck together, never giving in.

After the opening kickoff went out of bounds, De Smet started the game on the 40-yard line, and the Spartans were stopped after a fourth and nine situation. But, De Smet completed a 33-yard yard pass, and scored a few plays later to go up 7-0.

The Jr. Bills responded by going three and out. On their next possession, De Smet converted another third down, and sent a deep pass for a 50-yard touchdown.

De Smet clearly had the advantage on offense. Their starting receivers, who included Notre Dame commit Jordan Johnson, continually tore up SLUH's struggling DBs, who are replacements for starters senior Tae Wiley and sophomore Chris Brooks. It wasn't just those two who were missing Friday as sophomore standout Ike Thompson was home sick.

"Injuries were obviously tough. A couple of our top receivers were out," said offensive lineman Joey Lansing. "Chris Brooks has had

a bad stretch with injuries and he'll be out for the season, while Ike has just been fighting some bugs and he'll be back next week."

De Smet's offense went on to score four more touchdowns in the first half for a 42-0 lead heading into the locker room. One bright spot was that the Jr. Bills only turned the ball over once, off an interception at the end of the second quarter.

The game slowed down in the second half, as the SLUH defense put up a fight, frequently stopping De Smet on third down.

"I thought that our defense they played well against the run. We gave up one big run at the end of the game and for the most part we had a bunch of tackles at the line of scrimmage and for loss," said head coach Mike Jones.

However, De Smet's great run defense neutralized SLUH on must-convert third down situations.

"We have to give De Smet credit, they have a very good defense," said Jones. "They were able to get us off the field and we weren't able to convert on third down. They stopped us on every third down until the fourth quarter. They did a heck of a job, and we have to do a better job of executing."

The Jr. Bills finally got on the board in the fourth quarter; senior quarterback Brendan Hannah completed a pass to tight end Luke Schuermann. The score was 49-7.

SLUH's football team knew coming in this would be a tough game, but didn't expect to be blown out like they were. While the loss

continued on page 7



Dashiell Wuller vs. De Smet

photo | John Hilker