

Cross Country -- End of Season Wrap-up

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Prep News Sports Reporters

The SLUH Cross Country team faced many difficult questions in the first few weeks of practice: How would the team rebound from its most successful season in thirty years? Would this year's team be able to establish itself as one of the premier teams in the St. Louis area? Would the seniors be able to provide positive leadership for the talented group of young runners and could those young runners make an impact on the varsity team?

The answer to the last question became evident very early in the season as the strong pack running of the Harriers gave them three strong early season showings. The team lost to Parkway South in the first race of the season by a score of 24-31. Senior tri-captain Tim Probst won the race in a time of 18:24. The Harriers next placed third out of nine teams in the Southpaw Invitational and second out of six teams at the Eureka Invitational. At these races, the varsity developed the "Pack Attack," where all members of the team worked with each other on the course and finished in a tight group. This strategy proved successful for the Harriers throughout the year.

"I think the pack really helped to pull me along this year," commented sophomore Kevin Myers. "We could go to invitationals and use the positive competition within our team because we were in a tight pack to push ourselves."

In the next two races, the team finished a very impressive fourth in the thirty team field at the Hazelwood Invitational and seventh out of twenty-four teams at the Hancock Invitational. At both races, pack running was the key tactic used by SLUH. "The pack helped the team in both ways. The pack pulled me along but I, just as everyone else, also pulled the other guys along," said junior Ray Griner.

"Pack running brings racing into a whole new perspective," commented sophomore Matt Schuckmann. "I enjoyed races a lot more this year because of it. It brings out the competitive spirit on the team and makes a big impression on other teams."

The following Saturday, the Parkway West Invitational proved to be the most difficult meet of the season, as SLUH finished sixth out of ten teams. "But Parkway West was my best race," commented sophomore Pat Hamel. "I realized that I could be successful on the varsity."

The team then captured first place in the MCC conference meet, where Probst, Myers, and Kennebeck each acquired All-Conference status by placing among the top seven finishers.

After a successful conference meet, the Harriers prepared for their very difficult district race. "District was the day we were looking to all season, and, in the end, the pack came through," said senior tri-captain Matt Dougherty.

The varsity "came through" by finishing fourth and therefore qualifying for the sectional race. Dougherty finished first for the Harriers in 18:00, followed by Myers (18:03), Griner (18:06), Probst (18:06), Kennebeck (18:10), Hamel(18:16), and Schuckmann (19:02).

The following week was not as successful, though, as SLUH failed to qualify for the state meet by finishing seventh in the sectional race.

But the success of this year's team was not totally measured by its performances on the cross country course. "The team unity was great," commented junior Jack Kennebeck. "If one person was down, the others picked him up. The two seniors on varsity, Probst and Dougherty, were mentally ready every race and prepared the other guys to race."

Assistant coach Fr. Jim Goeke said, "The two seniors, as captains, both saw themselves as leaders of the team both in performance and in actively calling people to work hard. They saw themselves as responsible for the team, and that really made a difference."

"We've never had three sophomores (Myers, Hamel, and Schuckmann) contribute so much in a varsity team, and that was real important," said head coach Jim Linhares. "But besides the tangible benefits of giving the young runners experience, the intangible benefits were very important for the team. This cohesive group naturally did things right; the spirit was really there. We never have had a team that fought together like this team did. This is how we create traditions."

Cross country is largely an individual sport, but the 1992 SLUH cross country team proved that it is also very much a team sport. As SLUH crossed the finish line in a tight pack at the district race, a Parkway west fan was overheard saying that SLUH reminded her of a roller derby team in that they would let no one pass them. This was not said in a derogatory manner; rather, it showed that the spirit of this cross country team was strong and cohesive.

The 1992 SLUH cross country team will be remembered for its many impressive accomplishments on the cross country courses, including the MCC championship and qualifying for the sectional race,

but, more importantly, it developed a tradition of spirit, unity, and dedication to be carried on by future teams.

runners, Tim stepped forward early in the season as the team leader. Tim finished first at the team's intrasquad meet in August, and set the tone for the rest of the team, that the '92 Harriers were a force to be reckoned with. Spurred on by Tim's first place finish at the first meet of the year, a dual meet with Parkway South in which Tim beat All State Runner Mike Fussner.

The highlight of the season came when the Harriers captured the MCC title with a resounding defeat of second place CBC. In that meet, Tim led the Bills with a fifth place finish and ended the season as the team's number one finisher in 8 out of 9 meets.

At the cross country awards banquet, Tim was awarded with the Most Valuable Runner Award, an honor chosen by the coaches for the athlete who through his example, led the team to success throughout the year.