

Harriers Qualify for Sectionals

by Tim Probst

Prep News Sports Reporter

"It will be a showdown Saturday at high noon at Jefferson Barracks," assistant coach Charlie Merriott said of the varsity cross country team's sectional race to be held tomorrow. The team qualified for sectionals by finishing in fourth place at last Saturday's very difficult district meet.

SLUH had 96 points in the district featuring the top five teams in the St. Louis area, losing only to Parkway South (41), Parkway West (46), and Webster Groves (69). The Harriers defeated Kirkwood by 20 points, something the team had not done all year.

"We had been looking at the district race for a long time and we were keying off Kirkwood, who we had not beaten all year. We were able to beat them, but we still have one more to go on Saturday," said senior Matt Dougherty.

Sophomore Kevin Myers commented, "We're a real close team, and that has helped us all year, especially last Saturday in beating Kirkwood."

Dougherty led a strong pack for SLUH finishing in 16th place with a time of 18:00. Myers followed in 18th place and 18:03 and junior Ray Griner and senior Tim Probst finished 19th and 20th places, respectively, both with a time of 18:06. Junior Jack Kennebeck placed 23rd in 18:10 and sophomore Pat Hamel was 28th place with a time of 18:16. Sophomore Matt Schuckmann rounded out the top seven in 36th place in 19:02.

"We had the whole season hanging in the balance and we were not 100% physically, but we still made it through," head coach Jim Linhares said. "It's also fair to say that we had a lot of anxiety going into the race and we had to work hard to finish fourth. I'm really happy that we ran as strong a last half mile as we did."

Linhares believes that the team's spirit and unity was crucial in reaching the sectional race as a team.

"Without it, forget about it. The people in the top group have a sense of ownership about them in that they don't have to lean on outsiders for support. They help and support each other and themselves."

In the open race at districts, senior Mike Russo finished first in a time of 18:43, thereby qualifying for a spot on the varsity squad at sectionals.

Along with the three teams that finished ahead of them at districts, SLUH will face the top four teams at Jackson, which includes

Oakville, Cape Girardeau Central, and Mehlville in Saturday's sectional race. The top four teams then qualify for the state meet November 7.

"We need to beat all of the teams from the other district," Linhares said. "Oakville was at state last year, Mehlville is powerful, and Cape has knocked us out before. But we can be confident because the top five teams were in our district and we made it through to sectionals."

Last Monday, the sophomore team raced in the Tiger Invitational in Edwardsville, Illinois, and placed second in the nine team field. The team was weakened somewhat because the three sophomores on varsity did not compete in the race.

Ben Goeke finished in second place with a time of 17:43 on the three mile course. Following Goeke were John Weller (18:19), Doug Auer (18:27), Tim Denny (18:28), Tim Truman (19:43), Jamie Hallett (19:14), and John Andres (19:50).

"A lot of guys stepped up in this race and competed well. Tim Truman especially peaked as our number five man," commented Linhares.

The freshmen also had the biggest race of their season in the Hazelwood Freshmen Invitational last Wednesday, a meet many call "freshmen mini-state." The freshmen captured first place, something SLUH has not done since 1985.

"We didn't even have our best day. We're just so deep that we were still able to win and have eight medalists," said Linhares.

Joel Brown placed fifth with a time of 19:09 while leading the team to victory. Linhares was impressed with Brown, saying, "Joel has learned a lot about competing and coming from behind. I look for great things from him in the future."

Brown was followed by Ben Duchek in 12th place and 20:03. "He's had an amazingly quick comeback from an injury, so he's running totally on psychological commitment. He's really impressive."

The remainder of the medalists were John Caldwell (20:34), Mike Harvath (20:45), John Emert (20:51), Shannon Yates (20:53), Keith Myers (20:56), and Ben Fanson (21:00).

"There are so many competitive people on this freshmen team," Linhares said. "On other teams, a lot of these guys would be getting all the headlines, but here they are in the pack. To go undefeated this far into the season is very impressive."