

# Junior Bills falter, take ninth in 4A

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If the 1993 state cross country championships had been scripted in Hollywood — and turned into a movie — the St. Louis University High Junior Bills would have won.

SLUH went into the finals as the classic underdog — a team that had gone many years without hope, but then suddenly blossomed.

Unfortunately for SLUH, Jefferson City is not Hollywood, the finals were no movie, and in real life, underdogs can lose.

"We didn't have a good day at all," said SLUH coach Jim Linhares. "Going in we were shooting for top five, and thought we had a good chance at third."

The Junior Bills, who had been beating stronger teams all year, finished ninth at state. SLUH even finished behind Parkway South and Webster Groves,

teams they had previously beaten.

"I think we are a clearly superior team to Parkway South," Linhares said. "But they peaked when it counted, and I have to give them credit. We peaked at districts."

There were many reasons for SLUH's collapse. There was the bitter cold, and the fact that one of their top runners, Ray Griner, had to compete in spite of the flu. But one reason stands above the others.

"Not a single person on our team had ever been to state before," Linhares said. "When you compete at state without experience, it's really a gamble."

Pat Hamel, SLUH's best runner, finished 32nd with a time of 17 minutes, 14 seconds — far back of the top 15 finish he had been expected to reach.

"I think he's looking at next year," Linhares said, "and is

planning to be all-state."

The bitter, near-freezing cold didn't help, but Linhares isn't using it as an excuse.

"We just didn't cope with it as well as the other teams did," Linhares said. "You have to rise to the occasion. Maybe our guys learned that this year."

In spite of the disappointing end, SLUH finished with one of the best seasons they've had since winning the championship in 1961, a fact not lost on Linhares.

"Our accomplishments are real," he said. "They are on paper. We had a very good season. A poor showing at state doesn't take that away. Besides, next year, we are going to bring in seven runners with state experience."

Springfield Kickapoo won the Class 4A finals with 61 points. West Plains was second with 76. SLUH finished with 244.



Ted Faulhaber photo

Parkway West's Keisha Grace was bundled up on her way to all-state honors.